The Chateau of Montplaisir

Molly Elliot Seawell

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From
Mamma and Papa
To
Margaret
April 10, 1909

The CHATEAU *of* MONTPLAISIR

"She turned on him two sweet, dark eyes."

The CHATEAU *of* MONTPLAISIR

BY

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL

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"The Sprightly Romance of Marsac,"

"Papa Bouchard"

NEW YORK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1906

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Published April, 1906

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I

UNCLE AND NEPHEW

LOUIS VICTOR DE LATOUR, recently become lord of the Chateau of Montplaisir, sat, the picture of misery, at a window of the grand saloon of the chateau looking out upon the gray sea. To the right of him, and visible through the misty veil of falling rain, lay the usually merry watering place of Dinard, now—like everything else in sight—dripping wet and forlorn. The sky was gloomier than the sea, and the chateau the gloomiest of all. It was an immense pile, with a great court-yard in the middle, where the flagstones, like everything else about the place, were cracked and broken. Half the windows were out and the other half boarded

up. There were a few wrecks and remnants of furniture in the saloon where the new owner sat, but these wrecks and remnants were huddled in one corner, the only spot secure from the rain, which dripped ceaselessly from the glass dome in the centre.

As for Louis de Latour, he had been counted the merriest and lightest-hearted fellow alive as long as he had scarcely a franc in his pocket; but now that he had come into his inheritance he appeared to be as melancholy as an owl. He was good-looking and well made and had been reckoned to be of dauntless courage; however, it must be admitted that the Chateau of Montplaisir was enough to take the courage out of a Julius Cæsar.

Louis sat at a rickety little table, taking what he called by courtesy his mid-day breakfast, which consisted of weak coffee, stale bread, and something which old Suzette, who in herself constituted the whole domestic staff of the Chateau of Montplaisir, represented as a salad. But Louis, after tasting it, had determined that it was a collection of weeds

grown between the broken flagstones of the court-yard.

"Yes," he said sadly, holding up a piece of the green stuff on his fork and looking out into the dreary court-yard, "it is the same. Suzette thinks to impose upon my innocence, but I do know chicory from milkweed. However, she is quite justified. Any man who would accept this old rattletrap as a gift could be imposed upon by anybody in anything. And how delighted I was to get it, and how I used to mention casually, in the days when I was an engineer looking for work, that the seat of my family was the Chateau of Montplaisir, near Dinard! If anybody would ask me now about the seat of my family, I should deny that I ever saw or heard of such a place as Montplaisir. I am convinced that my cousin who left it to me had a secret grudge against me. That man was my enemy during life, and determined to punish me at his death. I can neither sell the place, nor lease it, nor live in it, nor give it away. But one thing remains——"

Here Louis paused, and, getting up from

his chair, walked about the room, surveyed it critically, and then leaned out of a window opening upon the court-yard.

"Ah, well," he said to himself, coming back to the table, "I now know what to do with this old rookery! It is perfectly practicable. I can burn it up, if only I had the money to buy the combustibles. But at least I can try. No harm can come of it, because the wretched old barn is not insured—no company would insure the place for five hundred francs. I shall at least have the biggest bonfire of the year. Sympathy will be excited for me by my having lost my ancestral chateau. I shall represent it to have been filled with priceless treasures of art. This room I shall say was equipped with real Louis Quatorze furniture and pictures by Greuze and Horace Vernet. The dining saloon, which is the barest hole I ever saw in my life and must always have been, I shall say was hung with tapestries of the same period as that of Bayeux. There is a mouldy old picture in there which answers exactly the description of a Salvator Rosa. It is very black, very dirty,

and looks as if it were done with ink instead of paint. I shall, of course, represent that as one of Salvator Rosa's masterpieces—after it is burned up. Then I shall also decorate that room with Paul Veroneses and Titians, and perhaps I shall throw in a Raphael or two—I can afford to lose them in the fire because I never had them. I shall spend the rest of to-day making out a list of the valuables which I intend to lose. It will get in the newspapers, and then it may reach the eyes of Julie de Brésac."

As the thought of this charming girl occurred to him, Louis threw himself back in his chair with an increase of his despair. He had met her in Algiers, that place of sunshine and merriment, and Julie herself was a creature of sunshine and merriment. She was young, lovely, and heiress to a great fortune. Louis was young, handsome, clever, and at that time heir to nothing at all. But he and Julie were of the same class and caste, the best in France.

And Julie had an old aunt, the Comtesse de Beauregard, who, for pure gaiety of heart,

prankishness, and an ineradicable passion for sowing wild oats, was quite incomparable. She was a very gay old person, indeed, and Louis would have preferred that Julie should have had some other guardian than this scapegrace old lady. But at least, as Madame de Beauregard was the most unconventional person who ever lived, she allowed Julie a degree of liberty quite unknown to any other young lady of Louis de Latour's acquaintance. This he had utilised in the most artful manner in Algiers, and had contrived to see Julie often enough and intimately enough to reveal the secret of his heart to her and to draw from her a sweet, unspoken acknowledgment. For Julie was very sweet, with all her wildness, one-half of which she was incited to by the irrepressible Madame de Beauregard. Louis's first thought, on hearing of his inheritance, had been that he could make Julie the mistress of the Chateau of Montplaisir, but the notion of it now staggered him.

"She would be eaten up by the rats," he groaned aloud. "The idea of showing Julie this place, of letting her know that I was so

cruelly imposed upon, is harrowing to my feelings. O Julie, Julie!"

Then old Suzette poked her nose in at the door. She had a face as brown and hard as a hickory nut, but there was a twinkle in her eyes which sometimes reminded Louis of the wicked gleam in the merry old eyes of Madame de Beauregard. These two were, in truth, sisters under their skins. Just as she entered a raindrop splashed upon Louis's nose. There was an umbrella standing in the corner, and Louis seized it and was about to open it over his head when Suzette, rushing forward, wrenched it out of his hand.

"O monsieur!" she cried, "don't you know it is bad luck to put up an umbrella in the house?"

"Do you call this a house?" replied Louis. "I don't. And which is the worse luck—to put up an umbrella or to die of pneumonia? Last night I slept under that umbrella—I fastened it to the head of my bed."

"O Heavens!" cried Suzette in a frantic voice, "how could you so tempt ill fortune?"

"I tempted ill fortune enough when I ac-

cepted this old barrack, but my excuse is that I didn't know how to get out of it."

"It would be a fine place, monsieur," said Suzette, clearing off the table, "if you had a million of francs to put it in order."

"And five million more to live upon. Do you know anywhere that I could pick up six million francs? At present I have exactly six francs, fifty centimes in my pocket."

"At least," continued old Suzette, clattering the dishes, "it is a good place from which to date your letters. It will look well on your writing paper."

"Oh, yes," replied Louis sarcastically, "and I might give an account of my domestic staff as follows: Housekeeper, Madame Suzette Didier; cook, Suzette Didier; butler, Didier; valet de chambre, Suzette. Some day I shall get lost in this infernal place, and you will find me eaten up by the rats, as I am afraid my sweet Julie would be."

"And who is Mademoiselle Julie, monsieur?"

"An angel, a ray of sunshine, a star, an exquisite flower, a gem of dazzling beauty."

"Oh, the young lady you are in love with! That's the way my Pierre used to talk about me fifty years ago. Lovers are all alike, monsieur, in every rank of life."

"But when she sees that I consented to accept this dismal old rookery I shall earn her everlasting contempt," groaned Louis.

"Come, now, monsieur," said Suzette, "don't be so downhearted. You are not at all bad looking."

"Thank you a thousand times."

"And I have seen stupider men."

"Oh, no, never! The possession of this chateau has forever ruined the reputation for any good sense I ever had."

"Now, don't say that. When things are at their worst they always begin to mend."

"Do they? Then just look around and see if there is a fire smouldering anywhere, and don't put it out. But it would be just my luck, as soon as the fire was started, to have a pouring rain come down exactly like this. However, that hope of a fire remains. Go, and if you smell smoke come and tell me; and

remember, whatever you do, don't try to put the fire out."

As Suzette opened the door to go out she almost walked over an elderly gentleman just entering. He was one of those persons who bear the stamp of prosperity writ large all over them. His clothes were of the handsomest make, his umbrella, his watch chain, everything about him betokened the man who goes into a great shop and asks for the best. He was clean-shaven and had a very intelligent nose, pompous ears, and a smiling and liberal mouth. But his ruddy countenance was more marked than is usually found among the merely rich, and he had a pair of gray-blue eyes which indicated a strange mixture of artlessness and shrewdness. Suzette took his dripping umbrella, and then, advancing, he made a very polite bow to Louis, who rose courteously. The newcomer said, handing a card:

"May I introduce myself? I am Monsieur Victor Louis de Latour, and I hope it is not presumptuous in me to claim descent from the great family of De Latour, of which

this chateau has been the seat for two centuries."

"As a descendant of the great house of De Latour, may I ask you to take the best of the only two chairs in the chateau which my ancestors have imposed upon me?" replied Louis gravely, offering the only other chair in the room besides the one on which he himself had sat.

Monsieur de Latour seated himself and smiled benignly.

"I am exceedingly grateful," he said, "that you should receive me as a relative and as a humble member of a distinguished family."

"My dear sir," answered Louis, "I am glad you take it as a compliment. For my part, I hate every ancestor I ever had. They appear to have had no sort of consideration for me whatever. They left me this old ruin, which I don't believe has had ten francs' worth of repairs on it in the last hundred years. But they took pretty good care to build substantial monuments to themselves in the church yonder"—pointing from the window—"comfortable tombs without a crack in them and

not a leak in a single place. That is the way of the world—every man for himself."

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Monsieur de Latour, glancing around him, "that you have no means to repair this chateau?"

"I have at present six francs, fifty centimes," replied Louis. "That is hardly worth applying to such a purpose."

Monsieur de Latour looked about him as if he doubted whether his host were a lunatic or not, but Louis's calm and graceful manner and smiling eyes were reassuring.

"Oh, I see!" cried Monsieur de Latour, "you inherited the chateau and nothing with it."

"Oh, yes, I inherited an army of rats and the most beautiful views in France from every window in the chateau; but, unluckily, I am afraid of the rats, who are much more comfortable here than I am, and I can neither eat the view nor sell it, nor raise money on it—so it is practically of no use to me at all."

"Then what do you propose to do with the property?"

"I have considered the matter seriously, and I propose to burn it up."

"Oh, come, now!" said Monsieur de Latour encouragingly, and drawing his chair closer to that of Louis, "don't be so desperate as all that. Since you have been so confidential with me, and as we are members of the same family, I will be equally confidential with you. Although I have always yearned to be recognised as a member of the distinguished family of De Latour, I admit that I have no proof, and my calling might be considered against me. I am a soap-boiler."

"I assure you," said Louis, "I have no prejudice whatever against soap."

"That's because you don't know what goes into it," returned Monsieur de Latour. "For my part, I have not used a piece of soap for twenty years. I use this instead."

He took out of his pocket a little box of fine white sand, showed it to Louis and then put it back.

"But I have always had a soul above soap-boiling. I began at it when I was a mere lad in the soap-boiling factory of Cheri, and a bet-

ter man than old Cheri never lived. Twenty years ago I started in business on my own account, and to-day I can retire at any moment that I like with a fortune twice as large as I have hoped to accumulate. Now, as you see, I am not an old man, and I have determined to stop work and enjoy my fortune while I can. Two things are necessary to my enjoyment of it—the first that I shall be recognised as a member of the distinguished family of De Latour, and the second is that I shall marry."

"Pray proceed," said Louis; "I am most interested in all you tell me. So far as I am concerned, I can only say that I should, at present, gladly recognise a ragpicker who had a fortune as a member of my family."

Old De Latour laughed at this.

"At least, I am not as bad as that. All I want is a good batch of ancestors."

"And all I want," groaned Louis, "is to get rid of my ancestors, for they have brought nothing but misfortune upon me."

"Very well, why couldn't we come to an agreement? Money for ancestors, eh?"

"I should be perfectly delighted. I will take one hundred francs for the whole lot."

"Oh, you are trifling! What I mean is this—that you should recognise me as a relative. This would enable me to use the De Latour crest, and it would make those idiots in my native town of Brionville, who have laughed at my pretensions, laugh on the other side of their faces. Couldn't you perch me somewhere on the family tree?"

"On the very highest branch, if you like."

"Young man," said Monsieur de Latour, drawing still closer to Louis until their noses almost touched, and tapping him on the shoulder, "you don't take this business seriously enough. You see, to recognise me as a member of a noble family would very much assist me in that other plan of marriage. How would it suit you if I were to adopt you legally as my nephew, according to the custom so common in our country, and settle upon you, say, three hundred thousand francs?"

Scarcely were the words out of Monsieur de Latour's mouth than Louis rushed upon him, squeezed him so hard that his ribs seemed

likely to break, and covered the top of his bald head with kisses.

"Come, come," cried Monsieur de Latour, struggling breathlessly against this overwhelming demonstration, "this is too much! You will strangle me!"

Louis, at this, released his hold, and seizing the old gentleman's umbrella and hat, covered them with kisses, murmuring:

"Three hundred thousand francs—dear, dear uncle!"

Then, suddenly dropping them, he said:

"No, it cannot be true. My dear sir, you must be either drunk or crazy."

"No, I am not," answered Monsieur de Latour, laughing. "It is worth three hundred thousand francs to me to have the notice put in the Brionville newspaper that I am visiting my relative at the Chateau of Montplaisir, and to put the De Latour crest on my carriage without being arrested for it."

"You may have it tattooed on your body if you like," replied Louis joyfully. "Three hundred thousand francs! If I did not think it a base return for your splendid offer, I

should insist that you take possession of this old rat-trap of a chateau."

"Well," said Monsieur de Latour, "I am a man of business as well as a descendant of a great feudal family, so I will wish to settle this matter of adoption upon a proper basis. You know, of course, that under our laws it is a very serious thing. It implies a degree of legal responsibility which, I am afraid, my young friend, you scarcely appreciate. You see, I have had to do with large affairs, and I know what the legal obligation means. If I adopt you as my nephew I should acquire over you all the authority of a parent. You could not marry without first asking my consent, for example."

"Yes, I know, I know. Three hundred thousand francs! Dear, dear uncle!"—and Louis again made demonstrations toward embracing Monsieur de Latour, which the old gentleman cleverly warded off with his umbrella.

"So now you understand fully the legal obligations of adoption under the French law?"

"Oh, yes, I believe you own me, body and soul! I shall not only have to ask your consent before I can get married, but before I get shaved, or even sneeze. But I am willing to risk it for three hundred thousand francs."

"Don't be afraid. I shan't attempt to coerce you in any way whatever. By the way, what is your full name?"

"Louis Victor de Latour."

"And mine," said Monsieur de Latour delightedly, "is Victor Louis de Latour."

"Why, I believe you are my uncle, after all!"

"Isn't it a lucky coincidence? Now, I will tell you what my ideas are with regard to marriage. I have a good many ideas on the subject."

"And I have only one, and that is to marry the girl I love, and through you, dear uncle——"

Here Louis made another dive at Monsieur de Latour, hugged him violently in spite of his struggles, and again covered the umbrella and hat with kisses, whispering to himself:

"Dear, dear Julie!"

Monsieur de Latour, like most persons, when talking of himself was eloquent and expansive. He squared himself off, putting his thumbs in his armholes, and said solemnly:

"The catastrophe will begin."

But the rickety chair, giving way under his weight, suddenly collapsed, and in another second he was sprawling upon the floor. Louis helped him up, dusted his coat, and giving him the only remaining chair, himself took a seat upon the table.

"Rather awkward, that," said Monsieur de Latour, rubbing his shins. "You must get some better chairs out of your three hundred thousand francs. Well, when I was in the house of Cheri I fell very much in love with Mademoiselle Séline Cheri, but she was then far above me, and remained so for twenty years. She is still unmarried, and a pretty woman yet, although no longer young, and a good one, too, and until I got this noble family bee in my bonnet I strongly desired to marry Mademoiselle Séline. But it seems to me now that we have had quite enough of soap-boiling in the De Latour family, and I

might look higher. There is a Comtesse de Beauregard, for example."

At that Louis's heart jumped into his throat and remained there, thumping, while Monsieur de Latour continued:

"You may be surprised that a man of my position should have any connection with a lady of Madame de Beauregard's rank, but it happened in this way. Her brother, the Vicomte de Brésac, honoured me with his friendship, and when he died he left me as guardian of the property of his only child Julie."

Then the room began to whirl around before Louis's misty eyes, and he heard, as in a dream, old De Latour's voice continuing:

"Madame de Beauregard has charge of the young lady herself, and, in fact, I have never seen my ward, but I have seen the old aunt. Great Heavens, what a creature! She is a woman of sixty who thinks she is twenty, and acts accordingly. When that old lady is awake the devil sleeps because he knows that all of his business is being well attended to.

I don't know what sort of pranks she may lead my ward into, but I am not responsible for anything except for Julie's money, which is considerable. Madame de Beauregard has one of those chateaux which carry a title with it, and if I marry her I should become a comte. That's a great temptation, you know; that is, if I could murder the old lady immediately after the ceremony. But, seriously, it would be an immense triumph at Brionville if I should marry the sister of the Vicomte de Brésac, and it would serve Séline Cheri right for not having married me in all these years. Still, I am not yet determined. Sometimes I think I should like to marry a pretty young girl, but then people would call me an old fool. The subject of marriage is always full of doubts."

"Quite so," answered Louis mechanically.

His mind had wandered to Julie and those sunny days in Algiers when, with his heart full of love and his pockets quite empty of money, he adored her and received those secret sweet assurances which a woman can always give the man she loves.

"Well," said Monsieur de Latour, continuing to talk upon the subject most agreeable to him in the world—that is, himself—"a curious thing has just happened to me with regard to Mademoiselle Cheri. I have a young niece, Mélanie Dupont, who has lived with me for several years. We were starting for Dinard to spend a month, when her companion, a worthy, respectable person, was taken ill and could not come with us. Mélanie found out that Mademoiselle Cheri had a notion for Dinard, and as the two are great friends she persuaded me to let her come with Mademoiselle Cheri. Mélanie, you must know, is always begging me to marry Mademoiselle Cheri and begging Mademoiselle Cheri to marry me. At all events, I agreed that the two should come to Dinard together, and they are now at a villa in the town and very happy with each other. But, of course, this is a merely temporary arrangement, and I have put an advertisement in the newspapers for a chaperon for my niece. It would seem a good scheme for you and Mélanie to make a match, but, unfortunately, the girl has be-

come attached to Eugène de Contiac, the nephew of the Comtesse de Beauregard."

Louis, feeling himself called upon to make some remark, although his wits were still woolgathering, said absently:

"Such a match as that for your niece I should think would satisfy your ambition."

Monsieur de Latour shook his head dolefully.

"The only trouble is that Eugène has not a sou of his own. He is naturally pious, reserved, and strictly correct in his conduct, and my niece is of the same character. But Madame de Beauregard is determined to convert him into the wildest rake in France and drives him into dissipations to make a man of him, as she says. As soon as he engages in an escapade the old lady makes a will leaving him half a million francs, and my niece, who is quite disinterested, and, as I said, very religious, promptly jilts him. Then Eugène is conscience-stricken at his behaviour, turns pious again, is received back into my niece's affections, and is at once disinherited in another will by Madame de Beauregard. It is a regular

seesaw. That old woman actually carries an advocate in her suite for the purpose of making and destroying wills. It is a very difficult problem for me, because at one time Eugène is a very desirable *parti,* and then my niece won't look at him, and next he hasn't a sou in the world and my niece insists she will marry him. Love and life are great puzzles."

"You will never get up a character for originality on that observation," answered Louis, his mind still full of Julie. "And so you have never seen your ward?" he added presently.

"Never. Luckily I have no responsibility for her, only for her fortune. But I have seen Madame de Beauregard, and I have been balancing in my mind for the last year whether I shall marry her or Mademoiselle Cheri. You see"—here Monsieur de Latour assumed a coquettish air—"I can marry whom I please."

"I suppose you mean by that," remarked Louis, "that you could marry fifty or sixty ladies at once, but that would hardly seem to me to be desirable, if possible."

Monsieur de Latour let this sarcasm pass unnoticed, and then said:

"By the way, the old lady is at Dinard now, I see by the newspapers."

"Is Mademoiselle de Brésac with her?" asked Louis, his heart beginning to pound again.

"I don't know. Her name is not mentioned," replied Monsieur de Latour. "Well, now that we have come to terms, we had better arrange to have the matter of adoption put in legal form as soon as possible. I think it can all be settled in a few days. Don't let anybody frighten you about the liberty you will surrender in becoming legally my nephew."

"Nobody in the world can frighten me from accepting three hundred thousand francs," answered Louis determinedly, the vision of Julie before his eyes—Julie, with her pretty head upon his shoulder, his arm around her waist, and all those sweet fantasies which haunt lovers.

"And of course you were not in earnest about burning the chateau down. We shall

have to come to some arrangement on this point, too, because it will add very much to my consequence to have this place in existence. True, it would require a fortune to rehabilitate it, but we might have a new roof and all the windows put in and rebuild one wing. Then, if you should marry an heiress, you might repair the whole building, or I might. Soap-boiling is exceedingly profitable, if you know what to put in the soap."

"You or anybody else are at liberty to repair this old barrack," answered Louis with the greatest cordiality.

The elder De Latour rose to take his departure, saying affectionately:

"Adieu, my dear nephew."

Louis's reply to this was to seize Monsieur de Latour in his arms.

"Good Heavens!" cried the old gentleman, fighting off Louis's frantic demonstrations to kiss him, "I can't stand this sort of thing."

"But you must!" exclaimed Louis rapturously. "How can I restrain my transports in

the presence of a man who has promised to give me three hundred thousand francs, to repair this old barn, and to make me his nephew? It must be a part of the agreement that I am entitled to embrace and kiss you at least three times a day—nothing less will content me."

"And I," panted Monsieur de Latour, retreating toward the door, "must protect myself from these vigorous demonstrations. Once a day ought to suffice you."

"No, no!" cried Louis, pursuing him to the door, which Monsieur de Latour opened precipitately, nearly knocking down old Suzette, who was listening at the keyhole. Monsieur de Latour, taking advantage of this diversion, waddled rapidly down the corridor, calling out:

"Another such hug as that will cost you at least one hundred thousand francs! I shall be here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning for our business interview."

And he disappeared, while Louis, seizing old Suzette in his arms, much to that worthy woman's astonishment, began to waltz up and

down the saloon, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Julie, I love you! Julie, I adore you! Julie, I shall marry you!"

II

AUNT AND NIECE

LOUIS, having waltzed rapturously with old Suzette in the corridor for fully ten minutes, returned to the saloon—ironically called the grand saloon—and began to pace up and down, showing his joy in every motion of his graceful figure and every expression of his handsome and vivacious countenance. His heart and mind were full of Julie, and as he murmured her name to himself, the rain stopped, the clouds parted softly and swiftly, and a flood of sunlight burst into the room.

"Julie, perhaps, is at Dinard," Louis kept repeating to himself until he actually persuaded himself that she must be there.

Then looking at his watch and seeing that it was after twelve o'clock, he determined to

hunt up Madame de Beauregard. He rushed to the barrack which he occupied as a bedroom, and made a toilet suitable for calling upon ladies in the morning—his one white flannel suit, his one pair of black silk stockings, his one pair of white shoes, and a new straw hat with a black ribbon around it. He surveyed himself in the glass with the earnestness of a man desirous to please, but in truth he need have given himself small concern on that score, because he had that combination of good looks, good manners, good temper, and ineffable impudence which is always irresistible to women.

He did not know where the Comtesse de Beauregard was staying in the town, but that was easily to be ascertained. Wherever Madame de Beauregard went she always made a commotion. She carried with her a retinue, not of dogs, cats, and birds, such as ladies of her age usually affect, but of human beings, mostly men.

Louis, walking rapidly through the sunny streets of the town, gay with the morning gaiety of Dinard, bought a newspaper at the

first kiosk he found, and in the list of arrivals at one of the most fashionable hotels he saw the name of Madame de Beauregard, with three maids and two valets, Monsieur Eugène de Contiac, and Monsieur Bertoux, advocate. Louis's joy was slightly dashed at the absence of Julie's name, and he was walking disconsolately enough along the shady street when he suddenly ran almost into the arms of Madame de Beauregard. And there, standing a little way off, smiling, blushing, and dimpling, was Julie. She was radiant, all in white except a splendid red rose which bloomed upon her breast.

The Comtesse de Beauregard, who would never see sixty again, small, elegant, with a laughing devil in her eye, but with a countenance not devoid of good-nature, was dressed in a costume which matched Julie's exactly, red rose and all. A sailor hat was tipped back upon her elaborately frizzed white hair, for the old lady scorned disguise in any form, and wore frankly, without any make-up, the costumes which would have suited a chit of sixteen. Her short white skirt showed her

little feet encased in the most daring of embroidered red silk stockings, which she evidently wore to be seen. She carried a dainty white parasol in her hand, and playfully prodding Louis in the ribs, cried:

"Here is our young cavalier from Algiers. Naughty boy! Why didn't you let me know that you were here? Men are so scarce nowadays, and hard to catch." And she tweaked Louis's left ear playfully.

Louis, his eyes still on Julie and his hat in his hand, murmured:

"I only found out an hour ago that you, madame, were here, and I was on my way to your hotel to call upon you."

"I dare say you are telling the truth," answered the old lady, twirling her parasol around her head gaily. "The men of the present day haven't spirit enough to tell a good, robust lie. In my day it was the fashion for gentlemen to tell great big lies to ladies, but the whole sex has reformed now almost past endurance. By the way, I understand you have inherited a fine, large chateau close by."

"'Here is our young cavalier from Algiers.'"

Julie, meanwhile, had opened her mouth several times to speak, but in vain. It was always difficult for other women to be heard when Madame de Beauregard was present.

"Fine! No, madame. I am thinking of changing the name from the Chateau of Montplaisir to the Chateau of Monmisère, or calling it the chateau of rats and mice, or something of the sort. But it is large!"

"And have you seen or heard anything of a grotesque old party of your name, a soap-boiler by trade, who is extremely anxious to be considered a member of your family?" asked the old lady.

Julie's mouth was opened for the fourth time to speak, but, as usual, Madame de Beauregard gave her not the ghost of a chance to be heard.

"He came to see me this morning," replied Louis.

"You are indebted to me for that," cried Madame de Beauregard. "You know he is as rich as Aladdin, and quite respectable. If he were not so tediously correct in his conduct, and of such tiresome propriety, I think I

should marry him for his money. You know he was a friend of Julie's father, my brother, who made him trustee of her fortune, and as I have charge of Julie I have met Monsieur de Latour several times. I told him about you, and put the notion into his head of establishing some sort of relationship with you. When we were in Algiers you made a very favourable impression upon me. I really believe you capable of mischief, unlike that poor rag of a man, my nephew, Eugène de Contiac. He is in love, you know, with old De Latour's niece Mélanie, who is twice as pious as Eugène. To think that I should not only have a pious man in my family, but should run the risk of the type being perpetuated! However, my family were all born to ill luck."

"I am a thousand times obliged to you," answered Louis, his eyes glued on Julie, who made a last desperate effort to speak, but was cut short promptly by Madame de Beauregard.

"Now we have the finest joke in the world afoot to play off on old De Latour. He is

advertising in the newspapers for a companion for that niece of his, and I put it into Julie's head to try to get the place. Old De Latour has never seen her, you know. What larks we shall have when we get Julie established as Mélanie's companion. She will have strict orders from me to get some of the piety and propriety out of that girl, because I don't want any piety or propriety in my family. I have too much already."

Louis felt like disputing this proposition, and Julie again opened her lips to speak, but, as usual, it was in vain.

"So now," cried the old lady, "you may look out for some amusement! I intend to have a gay time at Dinard. General Granier is here, you know, and a few men. I don't call every biped wearing trousers a man, if you please. It is only those with life and spirit in them who, I think, deserve the name. Come, Julie, it is time for our lesson in skirt-dancing."

As the old lady, seizing Julie, skipped off, Julie turned her head and managed to articulate one sentence only, and this was:

"Good morning, monsieur."

Louis stood still and swore silently at Madame de Beauregard, but he was happy, after all, for Julie was there. And then, what delicious possibilities of seeing her were involved in that practical joke which Madame de Beauregard proposed to play on Monsieur de Latour.

With these thoughts animating him Louis determined to carry out his original intention and leave cards on the ladies at their hotel. This he did, feeling as if he were walking on air. Then he strolled about the town for an hour or two, and presently, led by his good genius, he went down to the beach, where the sea was like molten gold under the summer sky. The first object that met his eye among the crowd of bathers was Madame de Beauregard, in a bright red bathing suit, disporting herself like a mermaid in the waves. And oh, joy and rapture, a little way off stood Julie, looking like a tall lily flower in her pretty white gown! Louis flew toward her and received a welcome from her eyes.

"Mademoiselle," he whispered, "do you

know what my first thought was when I inherited the Chateau of Montplaisir?"

It was one of those questions which require no answer. Julie, whose eyes were usually dancing with merriment and as fearless as a child's, lowered her long lashes, but in a moment she raised her glance and said:

"Was it of me you were thinking, monsieur?"

"Yes, yes, yes, mademoiselle! And Monsieur de Latour has offered to adopt me as his nephew and give me three hundred thousand francs if I will recognise him as the head of the younger branch of the family. O Julie, dearest!"

At that moment Madame de Beauregard, in her red bathing suit, came rushing out of the water and dashing up to Louis, shrieked gaily:

"Come, now, go and get a bathing suit and come into the water with me, and I will show you how to turn a somersault."

Louis fled, hotly pursued for a short distance by the old lady; but years and wind told, and Madame de Beauregard had to return to

the sea, keeping her eyes open for a young man more complaisant than Louis. But Julie walked up and down the sand in the blazing sunlight, listening to the quick beating of her own heart which was flooded with the sunshine of life and love.

III

GAY DINARD

THE fine weather continued during the afternoon, and the August sun, shining out brilliantly, drove the silvery mists oceanward, turned the sea and shore into a splendour of blue and gold, and made a glory of the fields and woods about the merry little town.

All the world was out of doors, including Monsieur de Latour, Mademoiselle Cheri, and Mélanie, who were having tea in the garden of the Villa Rose—a gardenlike paradise. Mademoiselle Cheri was a comely woman, although past middle age, but in her somewhat plain face was the charm and repose of a sweet nature. Mademoiselle Cheri had remarkably good sense mixed with her sweet-

ness, and by no means shared all of her ex-lover's projects and ambitions. Mélanie, on the contrary, pretty, pious, and trustful, thought her uncle the wisest of men.

Monsieur de Latour, much elated at the result of his visit to the Chateau of Montplaisir and his recognition as a member of the noble house of De Latour, being unable to keep the cat in the bag, let it escape before he had finished his first cup of tea. He began by announcing with a lofty air to Mademoiselle Cheri that he had spent the morning making the acquaintance of his relative, the head of the house of De Latour, at his Chateau of Montplaisir, and described with perfect truth the rapturous greeting he had received from his new-found relative. He did not, however, mention the three hundred thousand francs which he had offered for the privilege of making Louis his nephew and of putting the De Latour crest upon every one of his personal belongings on which he could stick it. He, however, announced that he had arranged to meet Louis the next morning, in order to trace up their exact relationship. "I," he

said pompously, "being the head of the younger branch of the family."

At this Mademoiselle Cheri sniffed, if so pleasant a creature could be said to sniff.

"How much, monsieur," she asked sweetly, "did you pay for your place on the family tree?"

Monsieur de Latour scowled. Mademoiselle Cheri was treating him exactly as if he were still a clerk in the soap-boiling factory of Cheri and Company, and he suspected that she already considered him her own matrimonial prize and hence took liberties beforehand.

"Nothing whatever, mademoiselle," he answered stiffly, "but I may say that it is extremely likely I may become the owner of the Chateau of Montplaisir and the head of the family."

And then, determined to impress Mademoiselle Cheri with a sense of his own dignity, he added:

"My connection with my new relative is likely to become closer, because we were so mutually pleased with each other that we have agreed to assume legally the status of uncle

and nephew—a common enough arrangement in France, which could be well imitated in other countries."

"That must have cost you a good many francs," said Mademoiselle Cheri coolly.

"Only three hundred thousand," tartly responded Monsieur de Latour, determined to let Mademoiselle Cheri know that three hundred thousand francs was a mere bagatelle with him.

Even Mélanie started at this, and cried:

"O uncle!"

But Mademoiselle Cheri showed not the least surprise, merely saying:

"I thought that, in your craze for family consequence and a crest on your carriage, you would do something of the kind."

"A great many people would if they could," said Monsieur de Latour darkly. "Give me another cup of tea, Mélanie."

"A great many more would not," replied Mademoiselle Cheri; "I, for example. My father was an honest, respectable soap-boiler, well thought of by all who knew him—a good father, a good friend, a good citizen. That is

enough for me. I would not pay three hundred francs to be recognised as sixty-fourth cousin by the greatest family in France."

Here Mélanie, seeing that her uncle and her friend were fast approaching a quarrel, interposed by taking a letter out of her pocket.

"This letter," she said hurriedly, "is, I think, an answer to our advertisement."

Monsieur de Latour opened the letter. It bore, in the fine stationery and elegant, if somewhat illegible, handwriting, all the evidences of refinement. The advertisement, which read as follows, was pinned to it:

WANTED—A companion for a young lady of good family. Must be well educated, a musician and linguist, and of unexceptionable family. Apply by letter to MONSIEUR VICTOR LOUIS DE LATOUR, POSTE RESTANTE.

Monsieur de Latour, with some difficulty, made out the letter, which was as follows:

Mademoiselle de Courcey offers her services as companion in answer to the above advertisement. Mademoiselle de Courcey can furnish unexceptionable references as to her acquirements and associations, and will be pleased to meet any appointment for a personal interview.

The name De Courcey made a great impres-

sion on Monsieur de Latour, to whom names and titles were important things.

"Now, I like that letter," he said. "It's very businesslike. It is evidently written by a mature and experienced woman. That is clearly shown in the letter—nothing superfluous, a plain statement of fact and desires an interview. Mélanie, my love, you may write in my name and suggest an appointment at this villa at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Of course, mademoiselle," he added, turning to Mademoiselle Cheri, "I appreciate more than I can express your kindness to Mélanie, and as long as you will allow her to remain with you she will, I know, be very happy to do so. I shall feel most grateful to you, but I do not wish to impose upon you. If this lady is all that she appears to be, I could engage her on trial and establish her in this villa, so that I could have the benefit of your judgment upon her qualifications."

Monsieur de Latour said this much, for after all he had a soft spot in his heart for Mademoiselle Cheri. He could not forget when he had been a clerk in her father's fac-

tory and sweet Séline Cheri had been the star of his existence; but that was before he became the prospective uncle of the head of the house of De Latour.

"Certainly. I think the arrangement an admirable one," replied Mademoiselle Cheri; "and, by the way, monsieur, do you know that your friend the Comtesse de Beauregard is at Dinard? I saw her going into her hotel this morning. She had her whole retinue with her. There was our poor, dear Eugène"—for Mademoiselle Cheri was in the confidence of the lovers—"her advocate and man of business, Monsieur Bertoux, two valets, and three maids."

There was not a suspicion of jealousy in Mademoiselle Cheri's voice as she said this, which very much annoyed Monsieur de Latour. He therefore smiled significantly.

"Oh," he said, "I fancied Madame de Beauregard would turn up at Dinard about this time! In my last communication to her concerning her niece I mentioned that I would be at Dinard for the month of August."

"And you think she came here to see you?"

asked Mademoiselle Cheri, with a suspicious innocence.

"Oh, no, no, no, I never said that! But she is a very fascinating woman, and the man who marries her will get an ancestral seat which carries with it a title."

"I think," responded Mademoiselle Cheri calmly, "that you are likely to have one ancestral seat too many now."

Meanwhile Mélanie, at the mention of Eugène, leaned her head pensively on her hand. Two tears gathered in her pretty blue eyes and dropped down upon her cheeks. She had not seen Eugène de Contiac for months, nor had she heard from him, and by his appearing at Dinard with his aunt, Mélanie knew well enough that he was leading a gay life, and a gay life modelled upon Madame de Beauregard's pattern was terrifying to the pious and innocent Mélanie.

"I think," said Monsieur de Latour, after finishing his second cup of tea, "that I shall call to see Madame de Beauregard this afternoon," and then, answering the unspoken wish in Mélanie's face, he added:

"I shall also inquire about our friend, Eugène de Contiac."

"I wonder," remarked Mademoiselle Cheri, "why that dreadful old scapegrace, Madame de Beauregard——"

Here Monsieur de Latour gave such a start that he almost upset the tea-table. The idea of speaking of so great a personage as Madame de Beauregard as "that dreadful old scapegrace" electrified him. But Mademoiselle Cheri coolly repeated the words.

"—dreadful old scapegrace, I say, should wish to make so correct and prudent a young man as Eugène de Contiac into a rake as wild as herself. It is more than I can understand."

Monsieur de Latour fell back into his garden chair. A comtesse of one of the greatest families in France being called a rake! But, he reflected, jealousy was at the bottom of all of Mademoiselle Cheri's remarks, and the notion so tickled him that he grew quite gay under it and beamed on Mademoiselle Cheri, whom he supposed to be cherishing an ardent passion for himself. By way of punishing her, however, for her disrespectful attitude

toward Madame de Beauregard, he rose and said:

"I think I may as well go and make my call now upon Madame de Beauregard. It is a very good visiting hour."

"Do," replied Mademoiselle Cheri, helping herself to bread and butter, "and say to Eugène de Contiac that I shall be happy if he will call to see me. *There* is a man who is as well born as any in France, but quite democratic, and has always paid me as many kind attentions as if I were the youngest and prettiest girl of his acquaintance and the daughter of a duke instead of a respectable soap-boiler."

Monsieur de Latour in a huff flung out of the garden. He decided that Mademoiselle Cheri was getting old—there was no doubt about that—and when people grew old they grew cranky. He regarded himself, however, as steadily growing younger, and began to be disturbed, in the event that Madame de Beauregard should marry him, whether the fact that they were exactly the same age, sixty years, might not be against him.

Monsieur de Latour, in the August afternoon, walked along the grand promenade, gay with elegant-looking women and well-dressed men sitting at tables, chatting, drinking tea, and eating ices, the blue air vibrant with music from the band, and over all that atmosphere of pleasurable excitement which seems to belong to Dinard. It occurred to him that he might find Madame de Beauregard among the crowd of pleasure-seekers.

He did not, however, see her until a well-directed chocolate bonbon hit him in the back. He turned around, and there at a table sat Madame de Beauregard, Eugène de Contiac, and a small, sunburned military man, whom Monsieur de Latour recognised at once as General Granier, who had been a lady-killer fifty years before at the republican court of Louis Napoleon. He was beautifully dyed and made up, elaborately and very youthfully dressed, and wore an orchid in his buttonhole. It occurred to Monsieur de Latour that the old general and Madame de Beauregard matched each other as well as the Dresden figures of Daphnis, the shepherd, and Chloe,

the shepherdess. But there was nothing rural about either of them, especially Madame de Beauregard. She was much nearer Chloe's age than Monsieur de Latour; that is, if she could be said to be of any age, for the brightness of her eye, the quickness of her hand, the overflowing vitality which bubbled forth, were more like sixteen than sixty.

She was evidently in the midst of a roaring flirtation with the general, and their remarks were so free that poor Eugène de Contiac, by nature as pious and modest as a girl, sat and hung his head in embarrassment. Eugène was neat, precise, clean-shaven, and not ill-looking, but persons not so gay even as Madame de Beauregard might have seen in him a slight superfluity of goodness and correctness.

Monsieur de Latour, considering the chocolate bonbon thrown at him as an invitation, advanced, and Madame de Beauregard greeted him rapturously. Eugène de Contiac, thinking this a good moment to escape from bad company, promptly offered Monsieur de La-

tour his chair and was sneaking off, but was caught by Madame de Beauregard and dragged back by his coat-tails.

"Oh, you delicious old soap-boiler!" she cried to Monsieur de Latour, holding on meanwhile with one hand to Eugène de Contiac, "I am so glad to see you. Now, Eugène, sit down. Monsieur de Latour will fetch himself a chair"—which he promptly did—"and try to learn something from the conversation of two such men as General Granier and Monsieur de Latour, who, I dare say, only wants a chance to kick up his heels with the rest of us at Dinard. You see," cried this terrible old lady, whisking herself into an attitude by which she thoroughly displayed her small and pretty feet in a pair of silk stockings more daring than those she had worn in the morning, and flouncing out her skirts so as to show a wonderful lace and chiffon petticoat, "you see, Eugène still has pious inclinations. I can't get that out of him, but if he ever becomes permanently pious and correct he shan't have a franc of my money, and he knows it. I like a man with life in him, like

you, General Granier, and you, my rural friend." And at this she actually pinched Monsieur de Latour on the arm in full sight of a thousand persons.

But to be pinched publicly by a comtesse of one of the greatest families in France was an honour that flooded Monsieur de Latour's soul with joy. He wished to say something impudent in reply, but could think of nothing more original than to ask after Madame de Beauregard's health.

"It is perfect, thank you," replied the old lady. "My back is not a day over twenty-five, my head is about fifteen, and as for my le— What are you winking and blinking at me for, Eugène?" she snapped, turning around on that unfortunate young man.

Monsieur de Latour, apprehending what Madame de Beauregard meant to say, hastened to interrupt.

"And Mademoiselle de Brésac, whom I reckon it a privilege to call my ward?"

"Oh, she's in the country!" Madame de Beauregard answered, again falling foul of the luckless Eugène. "This fellow has been

doing rather better in the last few months. He has been tipsy three or four times, has been going to some of the gayest theatres in Paris, and has given up reading Bossuet's sermons. I thought I should never cure him of that abominable practice of sermon-reading, but the last time I caught him at it I cut down his allowance five hundred francs the month, and it acted like a charm. Money is a great persuader. I brought him down here for the benefit of General Granier's society, who has promised to teach him a few things; and, as neither one of them returned to the hotel until two o'clock this morning, I am in hopes that Eugène is reforming."

Eugène, with a hangdog countenance, listened to all of this, apprehending that every word would be repeated to Mélanie.

" But I had a very difficult time of it," put in General Granier. " I took him to the theatre, and I almost had to drag him behind the scenes, and when one of the young ladies of the ballet made at him, out he ran for his life, and much too fast for a man with an artificial leg, like myself, to catch him."

Madame de Beauregard whirled around on Eugène.

"And is that the way you see life?" she cried indignantly. "Well, I always said I was the only man in the family. All of my brothers and nephews are like boarding-school misses. My husband, poor man, was entirely too good for this world."

"Not a gay dog in the lot except yourself," impudently remarked General Granier, and was rewarded by a kiss airily blown at him from Madame de Beauregard's little withered hand.

Monsieur de Latour, although somewhat frightened, enjoyed this extremely. It was a great deal more lively than drinking tea in the garden with Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie.

"I don't see," he said, "why our young friend objects to dancing the quadrille of life to a lively air. Perhaps I can assist you, madame, in educating him."

Poor Eugène shuddered.

"I shall be a million times obliged to you, my dear man," promptly replied Madame de

Beauregard, pulling up her skirt higher and showing so much of her chiffon petticoat that Monsieur de Latour was seriously alarmed. "But I know what ails Eugène. He is in love with your niece—charming girl, and I should not have the least objection to her if she would only be as gay as I am. But she won't, and won't let Eugène be. So I have told him frankly—for I am a very frank person, as you know—that he may have Mélanie and be pious and not get a single sou from me, or he can be a man, as I reckon men to be, and I will leave him five hundred thousand francs. No proposition could be fairer."

"I wish I could get five hundred thousand francs on the same terms," remarked the old general, with a couple of winks.

"Oh, I should not have the slightest trouble with you!" replied Madame de Beauregard gaily.

"Really, it seems to me," said Monsieur de Latour, jealous of the attentions which the general was receiving, "it would be easy enough for anybody. I always liked a gay life myself, and I could tell you some of my

experiences, madame "—here old De Latour assumed a mysterious air—" which I am afraid would frighten you very much."

" Then pray go on," cried this terrible old lady, " and tell us the worst."

But Monsieur de Latour, whose experiences were really exceedingly mild, felt ashamed to speak of them before two such accomplished sinners as Madame de Beauregard and General Granier. They were, however, a pair of merry old grigs, but Monsieur de Latour felt, as well as saw, that Madame de Beauregard, for all her kittenishness, was really a very great lady and not without kindness of heart.

Poor Eugène sat, the image of woe, his countenance lighted up by an occasional sickly grin at the daring sallies of Madame de Beauregard, to which General Granier promptly responded in kind, and which Monsieur de Latour vainly endeavoured to surpass. He hit upon a lucky subject, however. Madame de Beauregard speaking of her possible intention to buy a villa at Dinard, Monsieur de Latour, mentioned, with a magniloquent air, his recently acquired relationship to Louis

Victor de Latour, of the Chateau of Montplaisir.

"I think I know that young man," cried Madame de Beauregard. "A delightful young scamp, as impudent as they make them. He came near kissing me at Algiers, a couple of years ago. Now, Monsieur de Latour, I think it would be a good idea for you to repair and refurnish the Chateau of Montplaisir. Oh, what a name! What pleasure we could have there!"

This plan, recommended by a woman of Madame de Beauregard's rank and consequence, immediately appeared highly desirable to Monsieur de Latour.

"It would be quite possible," he said, meditating, "to patch up the roof of the best wing, put in windows, and get some furniture into the place in a week or two. Money can annihilate time and distance."

"Then do it!" cried Madame de Beauregard, pinching his ear, to the delight of the passers-by, who reckoned Madame de Beauregard as among the peep-shows of Dinard.

"And if I can make the place habitable, you will probably do me and my kinsman the honour of becoming our guest?" Monsieur de Latour said grandly. "And may I also count upon the presence of Mademoiselle de Brésac? By the way, is she in the neighbourhood of Dinard?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Madame de Beauregard, suddenly becoming interested in poor Eugène de Contiac's hair. "She is staying at a convent at Saint Malo. Eugène, why do you wear your hair plastered down in that sanctimonious manner?"

"But I thought you said Mademoiselle de Brésac was in the country?" inquired Monsieur de Latour, anxious to establish his association with such great people as the De Brésacs and De Beauregards.

"So she is! so she is! The next thing, Eugène, you will be taken for a clergyman, and I shall be forever disgraced. I have had a great many milksops in my family, but so far I have been spared a clergyman."

The party remained together a half hour longer, and consumed several ices and some

very expensive wine before they rose from the table, and Madame de Beauregard made a triumphal circuit of the grand promenade, with Monsieur de Latour on one side of her and General Granier on the other, while the unfortunate Eugène, with a carriage-load of wraps, parasol, fan, books, and other impedimenta, brought up the rear. For a man with an artificial leg, General Granier walked remarkably well, and Monsieur de Latour was electrified by Madame de Beauregard making minute inquiries as to how the chassepot rifle in the general's leg worked.

"Beautifully!" cried the old gentleman with enthusiasm. "I keep a record of my target practice and can hit the bull's-eye five times out of seven at forty paces."

Then, seeing Monsieur de Latour was completely mystified, General Granier continued, lifting up his right leg, which, apparently, was a perfectly normal right leg with correctly fitting trousers and a well-made shoe.

"Do you see that leg?" he asked critically. "The real one is buried on the field of Grave-

lotte, but this one is twice as good. I had it fitted with a rifle-barrel and trigger here in my pocket."

The general slapped his pocket, and Monsieur de Latour then noticed, as General Granier lifted up the heel of the boot, a small round hole which was evidently the end of the rifle-barrel.

"Well, every man must have his hobby, and mine is to shoot as well with my right leg as most men can do with their right hands. Come to see me some morning, monsieur, and I will give an exhibition that will make your hair stand on end."

Monsieur de Latour's hair already stood on end at this.

"Now," cried Madame de Beauregard triumphantly, "are you surprised that I adore General Granier? Think of a man having the pluck and ingenuity to make a gun out of his leg!"

General Granier showed his appreciation of this compliment by pirouetting on his left leg, without any regard to the crowd of laughing sightseers, for he, like Madame de Beaure-

gard, had been one of the monuments at Dinard for years.

"You see how delightfully gay we are," cried Madame de Beauregard to Monsieur de Latour, when they resumed their walk. "Now, do have that old rookery of Montplaisir done up, and then we will all come and pay you a visit."

"I shall endeavour to do so," replied Monsieur de Latour gallantly.

The party escorted Madame de Beauregard to her hotel. Once or twice more Monsieur de Latour tried to find out something about Julie de Brésac, but as every mention of her name brought down maledictions upon the unlucky Eugène, Monsieur de Latour abandoned the subject after Madame de Beauregard had informed him that Julie had all the life, spirit, and gaiety which her cousin, Eugène de Contiac, ought to have had but hadn't.

Monsieur de Latour took his way home meditating deeply. These two persons, Madame de Beauregard and General Granier, were of his period, though actually older than he, and yet life was full of gaiety and spark-

ling pleasures for them. He began to think that in the higher classes youth lasted longer than in the middle classes. He had been reckoned an old fogy even at Brionville, and Mademoiselle Cheri had a way of assuming that he was an antiquated person who had no longer any right to the fantasies or the follies of youth, and this was extremely distasteful to Monsieur de Latour, who had a taste for both fantasies and follies. He almost decided to marry Madame de Beauregard, provided, of course, that she would take him; but what man lives who does not in his secret heart believe that he can get any woman he wants, for the asking?

IV

THE PLOT THICKENS

THE next morning, bright and early, Monsieur de Latour presented himself at the Chateau of Montplaisir. He proposed to Louis that a large force of workmen should be put in immediately to make one wing of the old place habitable.

"For, to tell you the truth, my dear nephew," he said confidentially, "it would add immensely to my consequence to be able to date my letters from the Chateau of Montplaisir, and I don't mind spending twenty or thirty thousand francs for that purpose."

"My precious uncle!" was Louis's only reply, endeavouring to clasp in his arms Monsieur de Latour.

But his first embrace had been fraught with

so much danger to Monsieur de Latour's ribs that the old gentleman fought him off, and Louis was reduced, as usual, to embracing the hat and umbrella.

"I could very easily telegraph to Paris for workmen," continued Monsieur de Latour. "I could have fifty in here within twenty-four hours, and the materials could be had at Dinard. Fifty workmen ought to be able to make one wing habitable certainly within a fortnight."

"My beloved uncle," answered Louis, "you may have the whole chateau repaired at your expense if you desire. No one shall call me mean in that particular."

"And as for furniture and tapestries, if an order were placed in Paris to-day it could be filled within forty-eight hours."

"You are at perfect liberty to order furniture amounting to a million francs, if you like, also at your own expense, and Gobelins tapestries in any quantities you may wish. You will find me the most accommodating person in the world in these matters as long as you foot the bill."

"And pictures—we must have some pictures to hide those discoloured walls."

"Pray decorate them with old masters at five hundred thousand francs each, or if you prefer the moderns, buy a few Munkácsys, Corots, Détailles, or anything you like, provided they are good and very expensive. I place no limit upon you in that respect."

"Really," sarcastically answered Monsieur de Latour, "you are too good. I don't contemplate spending my whole fortune in fitting up one wing of this establishment."

"I shall put no obstacles in your way, if you do," said Louis with the utmost amiability.

"I am afraid, young man, you don't know very much about business."

"Of course not. I am a De Latour, and if you wish to be taken for a scion of this noble house you must forget all about business—that is, as soon as you have conveyed to me the three hundred thousand francs which you have promised."

Monsieur de Latour looked solemnly at Louis and then winked his left eye.

"I am a De Latour," he said, "but I shan't forget all about business. Don't think that I am dipping into my principal or even hampering myself seriously in spending thirty or forty thousand francs of my income on this chateau. It is difficult to spend much in a small provincial place like Brionville. My income has been steadily accumulating for the past twenty years, and this is my first fling."

Monsieur de Latour, however, being practical even in his follies, then proceeded to unfold his projects to Louis as they sat together at the rickety table in what Louis with much solemnity called the grand saloon. Plans were discussed, estimates were made, which provided for the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, but by no means foolishly or recklessly. Monsieur de Latour accompanied Louis through each room of the wing to be repaired. He selected his own apartments, a bedroom and a study.

"Not that I am what is called a reading man," he explained, "but it sounds well to have a study. I have had an office all my life until now at Brionville. I can bring

my servants on from home and get others here."

All the time Louis had been asking subtle questions meant to discover how much Monsieur de Latour knew or would tell about Julie de Brésac, but without success, until Monsieur de Latour, returning to the grand saloon, squared himself off and said in a grandiose manner:

"My object in hurrying things up is that I may entertain as my guests the Comtesse de Beauregard and her niece, Mademoiselle de Brésac, of whom I spoke yesterday, and General Granier. You see, my young friend, I am not without grand acquaintances."

"Of course not," replied Louis. "You have known me since yesterday."

"I mean other than yourself."

"And what did you say was the name of Madame de Beauregard's niece—Mademoiselle de Marsac?" asked Louis artlessly, meaning to throw Monsieur de Latour off the scent.

"De Brésac. She is in the country, or in a convent, or at St. Malo, or in Paris, or in half

a dozen other places. I don't know which. I could not get any satisfactory information concerning her out of Madame de Beauregard, and it seemed to exasperate her every time I asked about Julie."

Louis walked to the window.

"But she is coming to the chateau, is she not?" he asked, turning around.

"Oh, yes! She is young and pretty, I understand, and I like youth and beauty. The fact is, I have not yet made up my mind whether I shall marry youth and beauty, age and rank, or "—remembering Séline Cheri—"middle age and merit."

"I know which I shall marry," answered Louis stoutly. "Youth and beauty, love and rapture, smiles and kisses."

Monsieur de Latour then rose to go.

"I hope, my dear nephew-to-be," he said, smiling, "that you will call upon my niece, Mademoiselle Mélanie Dupont, who is shortly to become your cousin. But although she has youth and beauty already, and kisses and smiles in store, they are not for you, but for that very piously inclined nephew of Ma-

dame de Beauregard, of whom I spoke—Eugène de Contiac. I am afraid you would be too gay for my niece. She is, as I mentioned, staying under the charge of Mademoiselle Cheri, my old friend, at the Villa Rose. But don't go to kissing and embracing them as you do me."

"Neither of them contemplates giving me three hundred thousand francs," interrupted Louis. "I insist that it shall be made a part of our agreement that I shall be permitted to embrace you at least three times a day. You can get your life insured, you know. I shall do myself the honour and pleasure of calling this very afternoon upon Mademoiselle Cheri and my cousin, Mademoiselle Mélanie, whom I shall be proud to acknowledge as a relative."

The arrangements took up all of the forenoon and much of the afternoon, and instead of turning up at the Villa Rose punctually at five o'clock for tea, as was his habit, Monsieur de Latour was, at that time, in the telegraph-office sending and receiving despatches concerning work on the Chateau of Montplaisir.

But meanwhile Louis de Latour appeared at the villa to pay his respects to the ladies, quite unconscious of a strange and fortuitous meeting which was ahead of him.

A little before five o'clock Louis rang the bell of the villa, and was ushered through a gateway into a beautiful garden at the back, where, at their tea-table in a little grassy place almost surrounded by ancient rose-trees in the last blooming of summer, Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie received their guests in the afternoons. The air was soft and fragrant with the late blown roses, and the sunlight in unclouded splendour lay over land and sea. As Louis walked along the shady garden path to where the tea-table stood, the graceful figure of a girl, dressed modestly in black, was preceding him through the mazes of the shrubbery. One look sufficed. It was Julie de Brésac. Louis felt a shock of delight, rushed after her, and they met, unseen by other eyes, in a sweet and odorous solitude formed by a circle of rose-trees. Louis seized Julie's hand, and she turned on him two sweet, dark eyes and a charming face all dimpling

with smiles. There was pure delight in her glance.

"I did not expect to meet you here," she said with pretty gravity, seating herself on a garden-chair and arranging her black draperies gracefully around her.

"And I did not expect to meet you here, mademoiselle," answered Louis in rapture. "I suppose you have come, as I have, to call upon Mademoiselle Cheri and Mademoiselle Dupont, the niece of my benefactor, Monsieur de Latour. O mademoiselle, what a budget I have to unpack for you!"

"That will keep," replied Julie hurriedly, raising her hand in a warning gesture. "But you are not to know that I am here nor to recognise me in the least, until we are introduced."

What madcap prank had Julie now in her pretty head? thought Louis; for Julie was a madcap and given to pranks, and those which did not come of themselves into her head Madame de Beauregard was tolerably certain to put there, and this Louis expressed in guarded language. Suddenly it flashed upon

him, the escapade which Julie proposed entering upon with Monsieur de Latour, and Julie herself confirmed this by whispering to him, as she opened her dainty black parasol so as to conceal her laughing face:

"You know, I have never seen Monsieur de Latour, who is the trustee of my property, but I happen to know that he has arrived at Dinard with his niece, Mélanie, and my cousin Eugène adores that girl. I also found out that Monsieur de Latour was advertising for a companion for Mélanie; so it came into my head and that of my aunt that I would take a look at my trustee without telling him who I am. So I have replied to the advertisement, and I am here to-day to be inspected for the position of companion."

Julie said this with a dangerous demureness. Louis had discovered, in those radiant days at Algiers, that Julie was never perfectly serious unless she was bent on mischief.

"But, mademoiselle," he said, "although Monsieur de Latour may not have mentioned it in his advertisement, he wishes a serious and settled person as companion, or rather chap-

eron, for Mademoiselle Mélanie. That much I know, although I met Monsieur de Latour only yesterday morning."

"Am I not a serious and settled person?" asked Julie, tapping her little shoe with the end of her parasol. "At least am I not as serious and settled as you are?"

"Perhaps so, mademoiselle," answered Louis, smiling. "I am afraid that both of us are a little intoxicated with the new wine of life which we are drinking."

"At least," promptly replied Julie, "I am twice as serious and settled as my aunt." And at this they both laughed.

"All I ask of you," added Julie, with a side-long glance which enforced her request, "is that you will let me play my little part undiscovered. It is no harm—how can it be? I simply want to amuse myself a little. By the way, this is my first opportunity of congratulating you upon coming into your inheritance."

"I wish it were a better inheritance," replied Louis, fixing his eyes, bright with meaning, on Julie.

These two young souls, gay, affectionate,

and exuberant by nature, had from the beginning, established a perfect communication by glances and unspoken words. Julie knew Louis to be her lover, and Louis felt that the thought was far from unpleasing to Julie, and she understood perfectly why he uttered this wish. He desired that his inheritance should be more worthy of her.

"But," he said, "I have had a great, a marvellous piece of good fortune. Monsieur de Latour, you know, belongs, or thinks he belongs, to my family. Very well—I am only too happy to have an honest, hard-working soap-boiler among my relations. So Monsieur de Latour has arranged to make me a gift of three hundred thousand francs and to adopt me legally as his nephew. The papers will be prepared and will be signed as soon as ready. And then there is an another glorious possibility in store for me. My Heaven-sent uncle tells me that you and Madame de Beauregard may be induced to visit us at the chateau as soon as part of it can be made habitable."

"Then," responded Julie softly, giving him another one of those lovely sidelong glances

into which she threw both archness and sentiment, "even if I don't succeed in playing this delightful trick on Monsieur de Latour, I shall at least have—the pleasure——"

Here Julie stopped, smiling and blushing, and Louis, taking up the thread, said delightedly:

"I shall have the joy of being under the same roof with you, at all events, for a little time."

Louis paused and looked about him. They were quite alone except for the presence of a pair of blue pigeons, which were cooing softly on the top of an arbour near them. Louis leaned over and said one word, "Julie," and Julie, whose eyes were suddenly downcast, raised them with a look in their blue depths which Louis had seen there when he had scarcely a franc to his name. Just then voices were heard, and in a half minute more Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie were seen approaching. There was no time for any further explanation. Julie, like most women of her class, was an admirable actress. As the women of good society have to appear inter-

ested when they are bored, to maintain their gravity when they are secretly amused, to regulate their antipathies and control their emotions, they are already graduates of the best school of acting in the world. Julie at once assumed an air which Louis had never dreamed that she possessed—an air submissive and deprecatory and well adapted to the character which she assumed of a young person looking for work. Mademoiselle Cheri spoke first, in her usual kind manner; she had no idea that this fascinating young girl was the person applying for a place as companion, and was considerably astonished when Julie said modestly:

"I am Mademoiselle de Courcey, and I have called by appointment at this hour in answer to an advertisement for a companion."

Mademoiselle Cheri looked a little puzzled, glancing toward Louis, whom she had never seen and for whose presence she could not well account.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he said, advancing, "permit me to introduce myself. I am Monsieur Louis Victor de Latour, a relative

of Monsieur Victor Louis de Latour, and I believe I have the honour of claiming relationship also with this young lady." And he bowed and smiled in a pleasant manner peculiarly his own at Mélanie, who bowed and smiled in return.

There was nothing patronizing or uppish about this young man. Nothing could be simpler or more agreeable than his manner, thought Mélanie, who had expected to find him haughty to the last degree.

" I called to pay my respects to you, mademoiselle, and to my relative, Mademoiselle Dupont; but I perceive that you have an appointment with this lady, and I will postpone my visit to a more opportune season. May I return in half an hour? "

" Certainly, monsieur," replied Mademoiselle Cheri. " I hope by that time Monsieur de Latour will be here. We expected him at five o'clock, and he is likely to arrive at any moment."

Louis bowed himself off, and then Mademoiselle Cheri, inviting Julie to be seated, said to her politely:

"I am afraid, mademoiselle, there is a mistake here. I think Monsieur de Latour desired a lady old enough to be a chaperon, as well as a companion, for his niece."

"Nothing was said about age, mademoiselle," answered Julie demurely, "and I thought it possible that Monsieur de Latour might desire a companion rather than a chaperon."

"That is what I really desire," said Mélanie timidly. "I have no sisters, no cousins, and few girl friends. I have often longed for a companion of my own age."

The two girls looked at each other with mutual good-will. Nothing could be more dissimilar—Mélanie, nun-like in her simplicity and piety, and Julie, full of the spirit of mischief without a restraining hand to guide her. But both of them were instinctively good, tender of heart and incapable of meanness, and their very oppositeness drew them together.

"Perhaps," said Julie, "Monsieur de Latour might accept me temporarily as a companion for you, mademoiselle."

"Yes," answered Mélanie, clapping her

hands softly, "at least while we are at Dinard. I should love to have a companion, and dear Mademoiselle Séline will chaperon us both."

The two girls continued to gaze at each other with friendly and smiling eyes. Mademoiselle Cheri, the best of women and by nature a spoiler of children, girls, men, women, servants, horses, dogs, cats, and birds, at once replied:

"If it is agreeable to Monsieur de Latour, I am more than willing to chaperon you while we are at Dinard. I love to have young life about me."

The two girls immediately plunged into a conversation with each other, Mademoiselle Cheri taking an occasional part, and the longer they conversed the more companionable they seemed. After waiting half an hour for Monsieur de Latour tea was served, and Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie succumbed still more to Julie's sweetness and sprightliness. At last, finding it impossible to wait longer, as the alleged companion had an engagement for a very smart party given at one of the finest

chateaux in the neighbourhood, Julie rose to go. She left behind her a strong desire in the minds of both Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie to see more of her.

It was quite six o'clock before Monsieur de Latour, red and panting, turned up, bringing with him Louis, who had promised to return within half an hour, but who had carefully watched the garden waiting for Julie's departure. He had by no means the same confidence in his powers of acting that Julie had in hers, and had no mind to meet her again until he had better learned his part. Monsieur de Latour, seating himself, demanded refreshment at once, not only in the shape of tea, but in a glass of cognac.

"For I can tell you," he puffed, turning to Louis, "I have had as hard a day's work as I ever did when I was in charge of the vats of your respected father, Mademoiselle Séline. But," he continued, after disposing promptly of the cognac, "I have been quite successful. In ten days more, thanks to my own energy and determination and the good-will of my nephew here"—at which he slapped Louis on

the back—" one wing of my ancestral chateau will be habitable."

Louis agreed to every plan, and even suggestion, that Monsieur de Latour made, and expressed the highest gratification at all that had been undertaken, of which he frankly acknowledged himself the beneficiary.

"And then," he said, smiling, " I shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you, dear uncle, and my Cousin Mélanie and Mademoiselle Cheri, established at the Chateau of Montplaisir, to stay as long as you like."

Monsieur de Latour was delighted at this, and went on to explain the various orders he had given. Mélanie attempted once or twice to bring up the subject of the companion, but Monsieur de Latour, with his tongue tied to no ear but his own, would not listen.

" The great matter," he said, " was the roof. I can get it temporarily patched up, and then, when the season at Dinard is over, I can have the work done properly. The windows gave me very little trouble, as I found the frames were the regulation size. The furniture and tapestries were easily managed, and

I think those lazy Paris tradesmen will learn a thing or two from the way we do things at Brionville; eh, Mademoiselle Séline?"

Mademoiselle Cheri, who was as fond of her native town as provincials usually are, promptly agreed to this. Monsieur de Latour could not forbear chuckling at the accounts of his aristocratic splendour which his servants would take back to Brionville.

At last Mélanie managed to get his attention and told him that Mademoiselle de Courcey had called and was much disappointed at not seeing him, but had arranged to come to the villa again the next morning at twelve o'clock, when he must be there to meet her.

"But, my dear," remonstrated Monsieur de Latour, "I am to be at the Chateau of Montplaisir at twelve o'clock. However, couldn't you and Mademoiselle Cheri, as I wish to show you the chateau, bring the lady there, and we could have the interview as well as here."

"Certainly, dear uncle," cried Mélanie, and putting her hand on his arm, she continued: "I do hope that you will like Made-

moiselle de Courcey. Ask Mademoiselle Séline what she thinks of her."

"I admired her very much. She has the unmistakable air of good breeding which I think very necessary to a companion and most difficult to find in that capacity," answered Mademoiselle Cheri, secretly trying to forward the wishes of the two girls. "Don't you think so, monsieur?" she added, turning to Louis.

Louis, who wished to keep out of the imbroglio, was forced to speak, and he uttered only the truth when he cordially agreed with Mademoiselle Cheri.

"And the languages?" asked Monsieur de Latour.

Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie looked a little blank at this. They had been so captivated by Julie's charm that they had not inquired into her accomplishments. But Louis came to the front, saying:

"I have reason to know that Mademoiselle de Courcey speaks English and German fluently, and is an admirable musician."

Luckily, Monsieur de Latour did not de-

mand the source from whence Louis had acquired his information, but asked the question which Mélanie had apprehended.

"And how about her age?" he inquired. "She must be over fifty, of course."

There was a pause before Mélanie said timidly:

"She is quite young—not more than two-and-twenty, I fancy. But, uncle, I want her for a girl companion and friend, at least while we are at Dinard, and Mademoiselle Cheri says she will chaperon us both."

Monsieur de Latour put his cup down and looked around sternly. He felt that he had been chicaned by the whole party.

"No, my love," he said positively, "you have been talking nonsense, if you will pardon me for saying so, and you have committed a very great folly in encouraging this young lady, Mademoiselle de Courcey, to suppose that she was by any means the person I desired. I admit all her accomplishments, but she is too young. She would require more chaperoning even than you, and kind as Mademoiselle Cheri is, I could not think of imposing two

girls upon her instead of one. So I am afraid you will have to give up the notion of having her."

"But, uncle——"

"Not another word on the subject, my dear. She is too young. I wonder that you should not see the impossibility of any such arrangement. Besides, think of the scandal it would give. People would say that I intended to marry the young woman, and, being a bachelor, I must be on my guard."

"I never observed," said Mademoiselle Cheri, "that a bachelor on his guard was any safer than a bachelor off his guard, and besides, age is as good a protection to a man as to a woman."

Monsieur de Latour glared at Mademoiselle Cheri. This way she had of giving him penknife thrusts when he least expected them was most unpleasant. He felt then far more inclined to marry Madame de Beauregard than Mademoiselle Cheri, being fully persuaded that he could have either lady at any time he wished.

Louis listened to this conversation with

alternate hope and fear. The idea of having Julie established at the chateau where he could see her daily was inexpressibly captivating to him, but her taste for lively adventures, which was ardently fostered by that rollicking old madcap, the Comtesse de Beauregard, made him shiver with apprehension. However, he thought if he could once call Julie his own —and he had reason enough to believe he could—she would, like all other women who love, accommodate herself to his ideas, which, although not as strict as Mademoiselle Cheri's, were not exactly as lax as Madame de Beauregard's. The more Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie saw of Louis, the better they liked him, and he gave every indication of an intention to live up to his bargain with Monsieur de Latour and to treat the old gentleman and his family and friends with the greatest consideration.

" It would be just as well," said Monsieur de Latour after a while, " that we should have a family meeting and a little festivity at the chateau to commemorate the reunion of the two branches of the family. My lawyers

promised to have all of the papers ready in a few days, and then I shall hand over the sum agreed upon to my nephew-to-be, and it may not be all that he will get from me eventually."

To which Louis replied by a sudden sortie on Monsieur de Latour, and an embrace which Monsieur de Latour, rubbing his sides afterward, declared almost cost him his life. But he liked the heartiness and good-will which Louis showed, and the indisposition to haggle over the terms of the bargain.

The next morning at ten o'clock Monsieur de Latour was in his glory at the Chateau of Montplaisir. The hammering of workmen resounded upon the roof, masons and carpenters were all over the place, and Monsieur de Latour was inspiring and directing them with more zeal than helpfulness. He distracted the workmen by his directions, called them when they were busy to urge them to make greater haste, and, in short, his wishes outran his discretion, as the case is with most people.

The August sun shone brightly, and the old rookery was flooded with the warm blue air. The presence of the workmen and Monsieur

de Latour, strutting about declaiming in a loud, cheerful voice, followed at every step by Louis in great spirits, made a complete transformation of the scene. There was but one thing in Louis to which Monsieur de Latour objected, and that was Louis's propensity to embrace the old gentleman on every possible occasion. When he had done this about twenty times that morning, Monsieur de Latour stopped him in the middle of the courtyard and remonstrated strongly.

"Look here," he said, "I can't stand this eternal embracing and kissing on your part. It's all well enough to be grateful, and I like to see the spirit in you, young man, but I can't run the risk of having my ribs broken twenty times a day. There must be some limit put to it."

"Very well, then, dear uncle," replied Louis affectionately, "only grant me the privilege of embracing you and kissing the top of your head three times a day. With less I cannot exist."

"Wouldn't once a day answer?" asked Monsieur de Latour dubiously.

"No, a dozen times no! I cannot control the exuberance of my feelings for twenty-four hours consecutively. I must embrace you at least three times a day. Would you consider it a violation of this arrangement, which, after all, seems so inadequate to express my feelings, if I were to put my arm affectionately around your neck, thus?"

Here Louis insinuated his arm around Monsieur de Latour's neck and rested his head against his new-found uncle's left ear.

"Decidedly so," replied Monsieur de Latour, shaking him off. "It is the first time in my life that I have ever had to repress gratitude; but gratitude such as yours is positively dangerous. I think my life has been in jeopardy a dozen times since I arranged to give you the three hundred thousand francs. You are a very athletic young man and I am not as young as I was once, and although my life is insured I don't care to take unnecessary risks."

"I must then submit," said Louis sorrowfully, withdrawing his arm. "But recollect, three times a day I am to be allowed to ex-

press to you by my endearments my affection and grateful thanks."

"Yes, and whenever else you feel the impulse you will have to embrace my umbrella and hat. I put no restrictions whatever upon your endearments to those. Now let us go out upon the terrace and await our friends."

The terrace, like the court-yard and the chateau, was mouldering, cracked, and broken in every part, but the view of the laughing blue sea, the beautiful gardens and trees and grass and the charming villas of Dinard was most lovely. Louis and Monsieur de Latour had just reached the terrace when Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie and Julie appeared. Mélanie ran forward and, taking her uncle's hand, cried:

"Dear uncle, here we are with Mademoiselle de Courcey."

And then Mademoiselle Cheri presented Julie. The instant Monsieur de Latour's eyes rested upon Julie a sudden change came over his feelings. He became acutely conscious of her youth, her beauty, her charm. When a man is in Monsieur de Latour's state of mind,

having decided to marry and is merely considering the choice of a lady, he looks at every member of the sex with a critical eye—the whole fair is his as long as he has sixpence in his pocket. The idea recurred to him that he might select, as the future Madame de Latour, a young and pretty girl. He wished to see something more of the pretended Mademoiselle de Courcey, but it occurred to him at once that he had created rather an awkward complication by his firmly expressed determination not to engage Julie on account of her youth as companion for Mélanie on any terms whatever. Mélanie was delighted, however, and Louis secretly diverted, when Monsieur de Latour promptly began to promenade up and down the terrace by the side of Julie. Louis, by way of giving Julie a chance, took Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie off into a corner where there were some decayed seats—everything about the Chateau of Montplaisir was decayed—and while ostensibly showing them the view, saw Julie sailing into the old gentleman's good graces in the most unequivocal manner. Julie, with downcast eyes and the

most demure air in the world, was playing off her little practical joke on her trustee, while Monsieur de Latour, blandly unconscious that he was being hoodwinked by the artful young person at his side, was thinking that, after all, no woman is too young for any man, and rapidly coming to the determination to have Julie at any price as a member of his family circle.

Not one word on the subject of business was exchanged between them as they promenaded up and down for half an hour. The beauties of the sea and sky, the charms of Dinard, the latest plays in Paris, the last poems and romances, were the subjects on which Julie—the artful Julie—chose to entertain Monsieur de Latour, who was only too willing to be entertained. Being a very clever young person she realised all the headway she was making, and was not in the least surprised when Monsieur de Latour said impressively, after a while:

"Now, my dear mademoiselle, when the subject of your being my niece's companion was first broached and I heard of your youth

and—ah—extreme beauty and charm, I said that, notwithstanding your acquirements and accomplishments, you were not old enough to be my niece's companion, who would also be her chaperon."

"O dear Monsieur de Latour," answered Julie in her sweetest voice and demurest manner, "you have no idea how sedate I am. I am serious beyond my years." Which was quite true when she had a mischievous project on hand.

"I know—I know," remarked Monsieur de Latour. "I see that you are prudence and primness and propriety itself. But—but—the world won't think so."

"If you, Monsieur de Latour, thought me old enough to be your niece's companion, all the world—I mean our world, that is—would think so, too, because everybody respects your judgment."

This was laying on the flattery where it would do the most good, and Monsieur de Latour smiled delightedly.

"You are very good," he said. "Some people do think me a person of sense. But,

although I cannot possibly engage you as my niece's companion, another scheme occurs to me by which she can have the benefit of your charming society, and I, too, I hope, in a measure "—this in a very low voice so that Mademoiselle Cheri, whom Monsieur de Latour supposed to be consumed with jealousy at the other end of the terrace, could not hear.

"Any scheme which you advocate, monsieur, will be highly agreeable to me," replied Julie, seeing that she had brought down her quarry at the first shot.

"It is this—I foresee that I shall have immediate need of a private secretary. Of course, in my business I have persons to do that sort of work, but a private secretary must be a member of my family, and you are the only person whom I have yet seen whom I should be willing to have in that position. Do you happen to have stenography among your accomplishments?"

"What is that?" asked Julie innocently.

"Oh, well, never mind! Did you ever do any typewriting?"

"No, indeed," replied Julie, laughing, "but I have seen a typewriting machine two or three times."

"Well, that's no matter—I can get along without that."

"But I can write," said Julie.

Monsieur de Latour remembered that the only writing of hers which he had seen was far from legible, but he was not going to let a thing like ignorance of stenography or typewriting, or even the inability to write a good, plain hand stand in the way of his engaging a pretty girl as secretary.

"Well, well," he continued confidently, "I think we can manage. I myself write a good, legible, commercial hand, and I could assist you."

"Oh, if you would be so kind," cried Julie, "I should think it would be perfectly charming! I never thought I could be a private secretary, but I am sure if I have neither stenography nor typewriting to do and you will write your own letters, that I could fill the place acceptably."

"Certainly, certainly you can," replied

Monsieur de Latour. "And as for salary, only name your price."

But Julie was too wary for this.

"Whatever you think, Monsieur de Latour," she said.

"What do you say to five hundred francs the month?"

"I say five hundred thanks for it," replied Julie, laughing, to whom five hundred francs was by no means the enormous sum which Monsieur de Latour supposed it would be.

Then came the breaking the news to Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie, but, as Monsieur de Latour reflected, they had tormented him to take Julie, and now they would have no right to complain if he took her for his own benefit and not theirs. So he marched up to the group at the other end of the terrace and said oracularly to Mélanie:

"My dear, you have the most indulgent uncle in the world. As soon as I found your heart was set upon having Mademoiselle de Courcey as your companion, I determined to gratify you. It is true that her youth renders her unequal to the position of chaperon, but

as Mademoiselle Cheri has kindly consented to take that upon herself as long as we are at Dinard, I think we can arrange to have Mademoiselle de Courcey in another capacity. She is to be my private secretary."

At that a look of intelligence flashed between Louis and Julie. By some occult means Louis understood that the prospect of being near him had something to do with the present arrangement, and a thrill of delight went through him. Mélanie was immensely pleased, and only Mademoiselle Cheri looked a little disconcerted. Monsieur de Latour thought it was easy to account for this last. All women are jealous.

" So now," continued Monsieur de Latour grandly, " I hope very much that within ten days we can be established in this wing of the chateau and have some pleasant days together before the end of the season. We shall, of course, find acquaintances here. Among others "—here he turned to Julie, meaning to impress her with the fact that he knew some people at Dinard with handles to their names —" I may reckon the Comtesse de Beaure-

gard, of one of the greatest families in France, but a very terrible old lady, mademoiselle, and much too young for her years. Then she has a friend, General Granier, as old as Methuselah and as gay as a bird. Madame de Beauregard, I think, should be a little more discreet than she is. But some women never seem to realise the passage of time."

"Nor some men, either," replied Mademoiselle Cheri. "A woman always realises that she must some day be old, and the idea is too painful to be ignored, but no man, particularly if he is unmarried, ever actually believes that age can touch him, and when he is a complete old wreck he thinks, just as General Granier does, that he is Apollo and Adonis rolled in one."

This speech annoyed Monsieur de Latour very much. Most people, since he had acquired the power to write his cheque for three hundred thousand francs without seriously inconveniencing himself, treated him with a very great degree of respect, but Séline Cheri seemed unable to discern the difference be-

tween him now and in the days when he was a clerk in her father's soap-factory.

Monsieur de Latour, feeling called upon to justify his somewhat precipitate action in engaging this pretty young lady as his private secretary, and quite determined to have his own way in the matter, remarked to Julie:

"I think, mademoiselle, we must arrange to begin work at the earliest possible moment. I have some very important matters to attend to—business affairs concerning my nephew" —here Monsieur de Latour waved his arm majestically toward Louis—"and myself, so if you could report to me, we will say to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, at the Villa Rose, we could begin work."

"But why not here, monsieur?" asked Julie innocently. "If the weather is fine, as it promises to be, we could work on the terrace."

"Quite true. What a very prompt and businesslike young person you are! Very well —if fair, to-morrow morning on the terrace at ten; if rainy, at the Villa Rose."

Louis, his breath almost taken away by

Julie's proposition, gazed at her in astonishment, but nothing could exceed that young person's calmness and composure. Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie were not much used to private secretaries, and they had been so startled by Monsieur de Latour's sudden change of mind that nothing further could surprise them. And, besides, as they had both urged him to secure Julie's companionship for Mélanie, they were hardly in a position to oppose him.

Louis then invited them to inspect his ancestral mansion, which he professed, with the utmost politeness, to consider Monsieur de Latour's ancestral mansion likewise. The prospect of being established there struck the fancy of them all. It was a unique pleasure, heretofore out of the experience of each, and seemed like the beginning of one of those idyls of times past when a party of congenial persons could segregate themselves in some exquisite spot and keep the whole world at bay.

Old Suzette had, by some hocus-pocus, acquired a supply of fruit and cakes which she served on the terrace, meanwhile scrutinising

the party closely and coming rapidly to the conclusion that Monsieur Louis, as she called him, was deeply in love with Mademoiselle Julie, and that Mademoiselle Julie had a soft spot in her heart for Monsieur Louis.

As Louis stood on the terrace watching Julie's graceful figure disappearing in the shady path below, old Suzette came up, and planting herself with both arms akimbo before him, said, with a broad smile:

"It is the young lady in black, and I have a secret to tell you, monsieur. She is very much in love with you."

At which Louis joyfully embraced her as he had done Monsieur de Latour, and, printing a sounding kiss on her leathery old cheek, cried out:

"Do you think so? Heaven send you may be right!"

V

A DUKE, A COMTESSE, A SOAP-BOILER, AND AN AUTO-CAR

THE next ten days passed in a whirl of excitement for all of the people associated with the Chateau of Montplaisir. Besides the work going on at the chateau it was necessary to prepare the legal papers making Louis the nephew of Monsieur de Latour, and this gave Monsieur de Latour a valid excuse for Julie's services. He discovered at once the importance of making copies of everything he wished in his own round, clear, clerk-like hand, for Julie's writing was expansive and illegible beyond description, so that really Monsieur de Latour acted more as her private secretary than she did as private secretary to him. This, of course, took up much

time, and Monsieur de Latour did the hardest work of his life during those ten days. He intrusted Julie, however, with the task of forwarding and receiving his letters and documents, giving emphatic orders that his copy, and not hers, of all those documents go forth to the world, while hers were to be kept merely as duplicates.

Every morning Julie would appear on the terrace, the only spot available, as the chateau swarmed with workmen. There, with her pretty head bent over the rustic table used as a writing table, she would scribble away industriously, while Monsieur de Latour laboriously copied every word that his charming amanuensis wrote. Louis hovered around, wondering what was to be the outcome of Julie's escapade.

One of the features of it was that on the second morning that Julie arrived on the terrace she was soon followed by the appearance of the Comtesse de Beauregard, her faithful attendant, General Granier, and Eugène de Contiac, whom the old lady kept a strict watch upon lest he should go to church or take to

reading sermons. Monsieur de Latour felt highly honoured at being tracked to his lair, so to speak, by so great a lady as the Comtesse de Beauregard, and when she skipped up to him and playfully prodded him with her parasol he was very much delighted. He had invited her, it was true, to be his guest when he should be in a position to entertain her, but it was extremely gratifying to him that she should anticipate her formal visit in this manner. He greeted her warmly, and Madame de Beauregard's first speech was:

"So you have a private secretary young enough to be your granddaughter?" And, turning to Julie, she cried: "What is your name, my dear?"

"I am Mademoiselle Julie de Courcey," responded Julie, acting her part quite as well as Madame de Beauregard.

"Very well—I like your independence, and this afternoon, if you will come down to the promenade, we will have tea together."

General Granier seemed to know Julie also, as did Eugène de Contiac, but Monsieur de Latour, remembering that his private secre-

tary's connections were high, was not surprised at this. Madame de Beauregard insisted upon being shown through the chateau, and was so pleased with it that she reminded Monsieur de Latour of his invitation to visit the chateau, saying she meant to come and bring all her family and friends and remain for several weeks as soon as the place was habitable.

"And remember, monsieur," she continued roguishly. "I shall require at least six rooms—a bedroom, dressing-room, and saloon for myself, a bedroom for my maid, one for Eugène de Contiac, and one for my lawyer, Monsieur Bertoux, when he arrives, because I foresee that I shall soon have to change my will. Ever since my nephew here came within reach of your estimable niece he has been going to the good very fast indeed. I have reason to believe that he sneaks off to church secretly every morning, and General Granier tells me he does not think I shall ever be able to make a man of Eugène."

Eugène at this looked very sheepish and mumbled:

"I haven't been in bed before two o'clock a night since I came to Dinard."

"By the way," cried Madame de Beauregard, "I shan't require a room for my niece and your ward. She is in Paris, nursing an old cousin of ours, who has been quite ill."

"But I thought," responded Monsieur de Latour, a little puzzled, "that you said she was in the country, and then you said she was in a convent, and a few other places."

"And now I say she is in Paris," tartly replied Madame de Beauregard. "My dear man, do you think that my niece, a girl brought up by me, sticks in one place like a gate-post planted in the ground? No, indeed! My niece has too much of the spirit and independence which my nephew lacks. I don't know how in the world Providence ever came to make such a mistake as to send Julie into the world a girl, and this milksop, Eugène de Contiac, a boy. But Providence does make ridiculous blunders—there's no doubt about that."

Monsieur de Latour did not know whether this was heterodoxy or not, but he did know that Madame de Beauregard was a comtesse

of one of the greatest families in France, and was coming to visit him, and thinking Providence could take care of itself, made no attempt to defend its acts.

"I shall be most pleased, madame," he said gallantly, "if your niece will accompany you when you pay me the visit you promise, and I need not say that the whole chateau will be at your disposal, and in this, my nephew, I am sure, will unite with me."

To this Louis assented politely, but in truth knew not whether to be more frightened or pleased at Madame de Beauregard's threatened invasion of the chateau. Her presence, it was true, would give a certain protection to Julie when her escapade was found out, as it must be, but the old lady was such a persistent encourager of everything in the nature of a lark that there was no telling what would happen if she were on the spot to goad Julie on.

Madame de Beauregard then launched out into a description of her latest fad, automobiling in her sixty-horse-power motor-car, and in these adventures she had the assistance of General Granier and of a semi-royal duke as old

and as kittenish as herself. She cackled with delight when she told of running into ditches, lamp-posts, shop-windows, cows, and pedestrians, and of the car turning somersaults and scattering its occupants all over the place. She wound up by inviting Monsieur de Latour to accompany her on an expedition that afternoon, with the semi-royal duke and General Granier, and she guaranteed her machine would do sixty miles the hour continuously. Monsieur de Latour turned pale at the proposition, and paler still when General Granier mentioned that in the last upset his leg, which he always carried loaded, had accidentally gone off and sent a bullet through the hat of the semi-royal duke.

"Do you mean to say," asked Monsieur de Latour in a shocked voice, of General Granier, "that you keep that leg loaded on these expeditions?"

"Certainly," answered General Granier, grinning, "I am practising a new feat, shooting at objects as we bowl along at sixty miles an hour."

"But when you are upset, which seems to

occur every time you go out? I should not like to have been in the duke's place in that last accident."

"My dear man," gaily interrupted Madame de Beauregard, "we are not upset more than two or three times a week. And the duke did not mind having his hat spoiled. After all, you can buy a very good hat anywhere for fifteen francs."

This view of the accident was novel to Monsieur de Latour, but the notion of appearing on the streets of Dinard in a motor-car with Madame de Beauregard and a semi-royal duke, the glorious reputation he would acquire of being a sad dog, the commotion it would make at Brionville, and, above all, the acute misery he imagined it would cause Mademoiselle Cheri, were vastly attractive to him. Madame de Beauregard, however, was not in the habit of leaving gentlemen any choice in accepting her invitations, and demanded that Monsieur de Latour should meet her at a certain place in the town that afternoon at four o'clock. She took a great deal of notice of both Louis and Julie, but did not ask them to

accompany her upon the proposed motor-car expedition.

The old lady then departed with her suite. Monsieur de Latour, torn with conflicting emotions about the automobile party, was quite unequal to any work that day, and Louis volunteering to answer some routine letters for him according to general directions, Monsieur de Latour left the two at the writing-table on the terrace, where they spent most of the morning. Monsieur de Latour, wandering like an unquiet ghost about the chateau trying to make up his mind whether he should risk his neck or not in the auto-car that afternoon, noticed vaguely that Louis and Julie appeared to have a great deal to say to each other as they sat at the writing-table in the morning glow and scribbled at intervals.

When Julie took her departure for the Villa Rose shortly after one o'clock Louis went in search of Monsieur de Latour, who was found sitting in one of the deserted rooms, his head in his hands.

"My dear uncle," asked Louis, "what is the matter?"

"I am considering," gloomily responded Monsieur de Latour, his ears still in his hands, "whether it is worth while to risk my neck in that auto-car trip this afternoon or not. Besides the danger of being upset and of being run into, there is that terrible risk of being shot by General Granier's leg."

"Or drowned," solemnly added Louis. "The last accident that Madame de Beauregard had the auto-car ran into the sea and headed for the bottom like a submarine boat."

Monsieur de Latour groaned.

"But you must not flinch," continued Louis sternly. "You, who aspire to the headship of the house of De Latour, afraid of being drowned or crushed or shot! The De Latours are hard to kill. Have you never heard of that distinguished ancestor of mine who determined to commit suicide because a lady had preferred the favour of the great Napoleon to himself? He swallowed a dose of poison, tied a rope around his neck, took a cocked pistol in his hand, and jumped overboard in the determination to meet death either by poison, hang-

ing, shooting, or drowning. He swallowed so much salt water that he got rid of the poison, and, firing his pistol, cut the rope and was rescued without being in the least injured."

"Pray Heaven his fate may be mine," was Monsieur de Latour's pious comment.

Louis continued urging him, and finally Monsieur de Latour screwed up his courage to the point of making an elaborate toilet and meeting his appointment with Madame de Beauregard at four o'clock. As soon as he had disappeared and might be supposed to be out of the town of Dinard, Louis sallied forth to pay a visit to the ladies at the Villa Rose.

It was not yet five o'clock when he arrived, but on being ushered into the garden, there he found Julie sitting with a piece of needlework in her hand and a look of infantile innocence on her face. Mademoiselle Cheri, who saw from her window Louis's arrival, came down promptly into the garden; nevertheless, Louis and Julie had a delicious five minutes together, for every moment they spent alone was like paradise to both of them. Then Mélanie appeared, and Louis exerting all his powers to

please, which were considerable, charmed Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie almost as much as he did Julie. They had tea merrily together, and it seemed scarcely an hour had passed since Louis's arrival when they heard a neighbouring clock strike seven.

At the same moment Monsieur de Latour entered the garden. He was a pitiable-looking object. One side of him was all mud and the other side of him all dust, his hat was battered, his coat totally wrecked, and he limped slightly. To the anxious inquiries of the ladies he only replied shortly:

"I have been automobiling with Madame de Beauregard."

"You have got out of it better than most people," remarked Louis.

"Yes," said Monsieur de Latour, "I have, on the whole, been fortunate. General Granier kept up a continual fusillade and succeeded in potting a cow and a calf. He fired over my shoulder and under my legs, and, I need not say, made me very uneasy. As for that devil of a chauffeur, I believe he did his best to upset us, egged on by Madame de

Beauregard and the duke. None of them except me seemed afraid of anything—but I candidly admit that the next time Madame de Beauregard asks me to go automobiling I shall take the first train for Paris. Give me some tea, Mélanie, for Heaven's sake, and let me go to bed and rest my nerves." Which he proceeded to do as soon as he had disposed of his tea.

By eight o'clock he was sound asleep in bed. Just as he was comfortably tucked in he heard a tremendous commotion in front of the villa. Madame de Beauregard had come to ask him to go upon a moonlight expedition in the motor-car, but this Monsieur de Latour firmly declined to do, and for fear Madame de Beauregard should come up and drag him out of bed he locked and double-locked the door and breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the auto-car clattering away in the distance.

For several days after the auto-car expedition Monsieur de Latour was laid up for repairs; but he was nevertheless able, though somewhat dilapidated, to get about, and especially to superintend the work being done at

"'I have been automobiling with Madame de Beauregard.'"

the Chateau of Montplaisir. He did not, however, do any more automobiling with Madame de Beauregard, although the old lady pursued him to that end in such a way that she declared she was afraid every rag of her reputation would be lost. It was in vain that she offered him the inducement of the semi-royal duke's society and other very great people. Monsieur de Latour was firm in declining. He loved rank and high-sounding names, but he loved his own carcass better than either and refused to risk it. He made business his excuse, and required Julie's services every day at the chateau; and Julie was always promptly on hand.

But, with the single exception of being always on the spot at the moment, Julie's ideas of business were rudimentary. After a day or two, when replies to his letters began to come in, Monsieur de Latour discovered a peculiarity of Julie's, which was that it seemed impossible she should write any communication without omitting at least one word. It was rarely more than one, and generally, as Julie urged in extenuation, a very little one,

an " an " or a " but," but it was always at a critical point and invariably resulted in endless confusion and misunderstandings. At first Monsieur de Latour, meaning to instruct Julie in the art of transacting the business of a private secretary, remonstrated with her kindly. Julie took these remonstrances in the most amiable manner possible, made profuse apologies and promises to reform, and repeated the mistake as soon as possible thereafter. Then Monsieur de Latour attempted to be stern, and Julie, with a sidelong glance of her beautiful eyes, explained that, much as she sought to be exact, it was impossible for her to be so because he was so interesting she was always wondering about him, whether he had been happy all his life, and if he had ever had a real love-affair, and how many women had wished to marry him. At that Monsieur de Latour's mouth, in spite of him, came open like a rat-trap, and there was nothing more to be said.

Again he was seriously vexed. By Julie's process he was made to declare that a pair of carriage-horses which he had sold for a high

price, had not four good legs between them, and that he knew it at the time of selling. When this was traced home to Julie she laughed delightedly and cried:

"But you got the money, didn't you, monsieur? What difference does it make about the horses' legs?"

"It makes a great deal of difference," replied Monsieur de Latour grimly, "whether a horse has four legs or two."

"Then," cried Julie, clapping her hands, "why not write and tell the person who bought the horses all about General Granier's leg? That will amuse him, and then he will forget that the horses you sold him only had four good legs between them."

"Mademoiselle!" roared Monsieur de Latour, now fairly roused.

But before he could say another word Julie jumped up and, blowing him a couple of kisses from her finger-tips, cried:

"There, there, don't worry about it! You have got the money and you've sold two worthless horses for the price of a pair of good ones and that's all—my time is up—

come to tea at five—adieu!" And she ran off.

This was certainly very provoking, thought Monsieur de Latour, but he had been so determined on securing Julie's presence he was loath to admit what Mademoiselle Cheri had said from the beginning, that Julie was not fitted to be a private secretary.

Meanwhile preparations for the house party went on famously, and Monsieur de Latour, who had among his other virtues a true hospitality, looked forward with pleasure to having the chateau full of guests. Louis insisted that Monsieur de Latour should play the host quite as much as himself, and Monsieur de Latour was more than willing.

He had asked Madame de Beauregard several times about his ward, Mademoiselle de Brésac, and had sent her a cordial invitation to join the party at the chateau. But Mademoiselle de Brésac appeared to be a will-o'-the-wisp—so much so that Monsieur de Latour one day remarked to Louis, as Madame de Beauregard with her party in a magnificent red devil whizzed past them on the road:

"I think there is some mystery about my ward, Mademoiselle de Brésac. I find it impossible to get from Madame de Beauregard Mademoiselle de Brésac's actual abiding-place. One day she is in the country near here, another day she is in a convent at St. Malo, another time she is nursing an invalid cousin at Paris, yesterday she was making a visit to England, and this morning Madame de Beauregard tells me she is in Switzerland. She appears to be quite as gay as her aunt."

"Yes," assented Louis, "but I have reason to know that she is very charming."

"I wish very much that she could join our party at the chateau for next week. Can you contrive to find out where she is and to secure her presence?"

"I think, possibly," replied Louis meditatively as they walked along the sunny street, "I might do so."

"It would be a real gratification to me, and it would add to the obligations I already owe you, for, my dear Louis, I appreciate very much your politeness to me and to my niece, and also to Mademoiselle Cheri. There are

some things in our agreement which cannot be reckoned in money, and one of them is your courtesy to my family. It is evident that you are not ashamed of us."

"Far from it," replied Louis. "You know the pride and delight I take in you, the very flower of the De Latours, and I am more than pleased to acknowledge Mélanie as my cousin."

It was with genuine enjoyment that Monsieur de Latour, on the tenth day after the influx of workmen in the chateau, saw the last of them depart and awaited the arrival of a house party consisting of Mademoiselle Cheri and his niece, of Julie, whom he positively declared it impossible to transact business without, and whom it was equally impossible to transact business with, of Madame de Beauregard and Eugène de Contiac. Monsieur de Latour had felt some compunction at not inviting General Granier to stay at the chateau, but although his present inclination was that Madame de Beauregard was entirely too old for him and Julie just the right age, yet he decided that General Granier,

with his military air, his title as general, and his interesting wooden leg, was too dangerous a rival. As a matter of fact, General Granier had endless stories to tell of his prowess with his leg, of various kinds of game brought down, the snuffing of candles, the hitting of bull's-eyes and all the other achievements of a crack shot. Madame de Beauregard had frankly asked, and even insisted, that General Granier should be invited, but the more she insisted the less inclined Monsieur de Latour was to bring the fascinating old general into competition with himself.

"To tell you the truth, madame," he had said to the Comtesse de Beauregard, "I am afraid of that leg of General Granier's. I believe it is always loaded, and is liable to go off at any time. Now, suppose we were sitting at dinner, for example, and the general should inadvertently clap his hand into his pocket and touch the trigger—what do you suppose would happen?"

"That would depend altogether upon the direction of the leg, my dear man," replied Madame de Beauregard, who often ad-

dressed Monsieur de Latour in this familiar manner. "For my part I find General Granier's leg far more interesting than his head, and I am not in the least afraid of either. However, I shall ask him up to tea every afternoon, and you can invite him to remain to dinner, and if you don't I will."

Such was the lady whom Monsieur de Latour had invited to pay him a visit. It even occurred to him that it was just as well his ward, Mademoiselle de Brésac, did not see very much of her aunt, and out of regard for her father's memory Monsieur de Latour would have welcomed the marriage of Julie de Brésac so that he could see her in the hands of a discreet husband.

However, all these misgivings were in abeyance on the August afternoon when Monsieur de Latour, with Louis, made a final inspection of the wing of the chateau which had been made habitable. Wonders had been worked by the army of artisans. The walls and ceilings which showed age and decay most were covered, when possible, with draperies, pictures, and mirrors. The discoloured

floors were concealed by costly rugs, and carloads of furniture had been distributed among the great rooms. A large domestic staff had arrived from Brionville, and Suzette had been deposed as major-domo, cook, and housemaid. Her services, however, as valet were retained by Louis, who declared his intention of teaching her to shave him, as she already dressed him.

Suzette was delighted at the turn affairs had taken, for she had become much attached to Louis in the days of his poverty and rejoiced in his prosperity. Louis, himself, felt as if he were taking part in the adventures of Aladdin, and walked about the chateau in a dazed fashion, wondering if the gilt chairs were real or if the rugs were not an optical illusion. Daily his gratitude became more effervescent, and he implored from Monsieur de Latour the privilege of embracing him at least four instead of three times a day; this, however, Monsieur de Latour promptly refused.

"But I must embrace something," cried Louis in the exuberance of feeling.

"Then go and try your hand on Madame de Beauregard," replied Monsieur de Latour.

Louis misinterpreted this recommendation, and within half an hour afterward came very near being caught by Monsieur de Latour in the act of embracing Julie. For Julie was sitting in her usual place on the terrace before the writing-table, waiting for Monsieur de Latour to arrive, when Louis, stealing up to her, whispered in her ear:

"Julie, to-morrow the papers will be signed making me Monsieur de Latour's nephew, and three hundred thousand francs will be mine, in addition to the Chateau of Montplaisir."

Louis paused, and Julie, whose pretty eyes were downcast, raised them and giving him a bewitching glance, said:

"I care nothing for your three hundred thousand francs."

Louis's face grew pale, and paler still when Julie added after a moment:

"Nor for your Chateau of Montplaisir."

And then, looking around and seeing no

one in sight, she extended her hand a little toward Louis—a trifling gesture, but full of sweet meaning. Her eyes said plainly, "It is you for whom I care." The look was illuminating.

"Mademoiselle, may I show you the orangery which has just been formed at the south end of the terrace?"

Julie rose willingly enough, and the two, walking on air, as it were, passed along the terrace to the extreme end where dozens of orange-trees in tubs made a place of sylvan beauty. When they were under the green arcade they were quite secure from observation. There was no time to think. Neither knew how it happened, but suddenly Louis's arm was around Julie and their lips had met. And the next moment Monsieur de Latour's jovial voice resounded at the other end of the arcade.

"Where is Mademoiselle de Courcey? I have something here very important to be copied."

Julie scuttled back to the writing-table in less time than it takes to tell, and Louis,

far less self-composed, dashed around the corner of the terrace and disappeared. Monsieur de Latour came bustling out with a telegram in his hand.

"My dear young lady," he asked, "please answer this at once, and pray be careful. I think, so far as I know, that you have not yet written anything for me precisely as I dictated it. There is always a word or two goes wrong. But nothing must go wrong now. Here you see at the factory they are asking directions about a large quantity of soap now boiling. They want to know about adding more soda. So, write the despatch, thus."

Monsieur de Latour gave the address and then dictated slowly and portentously:

"Whatever you do, put no more soda in the sixteen vats."

"Now write it out for me quickly, so that I can send it off."

Julie, who was still palpitating and blushing, and to whom the absent Louis was nearer than the present Monsieur de Latour, wrote out the despatch and handed it to Monsieur

de Latour to read. He put on his spectacles and tried to make it out, but could not.

"It's very inconvenient," he said after a moment or two, "having a private secretary who can't write legibly. I shall have to write this despatch myself."

He sat down and wrote it out, and then calling a servant to Julie to send the despatch, bustled away himself to give the last orders for the entertainment of his guests. When the servant came, Julie, whose head and heart were in a whirl, absently followed her usual practice, handed him her own despatch and carefully tucked Monsieur de Latour's away in her belt, which served her for a despatch-box, escritoire and burglar-proof safe combined, for the important papers confided to her charge.

And then Madame de Beauregard's screeches of laughter being heard in the courtyard, Julie saw that gay old person descending from her favourite red devil, which was snorting and puffing before the main door of the chateau. She was accompanied by Eugène de Contiac, General Granier, and by an

unexpected guest in the person of her lawyer, Monsieur Bertoux. He was a staid and somewhat wary-looking man, which would naturally be the case, as he lived in hot pursuit of Madame de Beauregard and was required to make almost monthly changes in the disposition of her property. Monsieur de Latour, followed by Louis, came out to greet them.

"You see, my dear man," cried the old lady to Monsieur de Latour, who had advanced to greet her, "I have brought Monsieur Bertoux along with me. He is a very pleasant sort of person, and more interesting than he looks, as you will find out. And besides, I foresee that unless my nephew changes his course I shall be compelled not only to leave him out of my will, but to cut off his allowance. It is always the way," continued the old lady quite angrily; "just as soon as he falls under the influence of your niece, Mélanie, Eugène forgets all the instructions I have given him to be a man, and a very larky one at that, and gets so dreadfully pious and moral there is really no

standing him. And as of course he will have to see a great deal of Mélanie during this visit, I thought it just as well to have my lawyer on the spot, in case Eugène should go to extremes and insist on going to church every morning, for example. Not that I have the slightest personal objection to Mélanie—it is only her principles that I oppose, and if she will turn about and commit a few indiscretions I shall be more than willing for the match. But I don't want any of these pious and God-fearing men in my family, and Eugène must be a man of spirit if he wants to get my money."

And then, turning to Louis, she said laughing:

"Now, if you will engage to lead this goody-goody boy astray I will give you something handsome, because I see that you are one of the devil's darlings, and that's the sort I like."

"Madame, you praise me beyond my deserts," replied Louis, taking the old lady's hand and kissing it gallantly. "But if you, with your fascinations and delightful exam-

ple, cannot succeed in leading him astray, nobody can."

The old lady screamed with delight at this bold declaration, which was received by Eugène in sheepish silence, and at that very moment Mélanie and Mademoiselle Cheri appeared. Madame de Beauregard had a voice like an auctioneer, and her words were plainly audible to the advancing Mélanie. Madame de Beauregard, however, with the utmost goodwill greeted her and Mademoiselle Cherie.

"I dare say, my dear," she cried to Mélanie, "you heard every word that I said, and I mean to stand by it. Either you and Eugène have got to change your principles, or you won't get a centime of my money. While I am here I shall give you every opportunity to commit any of the delightful improprieties which you might, but won't."

Eugène and Mélanie presented a pitiable sight while this was going on. Both blushed and were embarrassed beyond measure. But Monsieur de Latour came to their relief by cordially welcoming Madame de Beauregard

and inviting the entire party to make a tour of the renovated wing of the chateau. Marvels had certainly been accomplished, and Monsieur de Latour, anxious to justify himself for the employment of his private secretary, would say of everything, "This was the result of Mademoiselle de Courcey's taste," or, "I contrived to get this done through Mademoiselle de Courcey's promptness in telegraphing my orders."

The party at his heels listened to all of these explanations, and Madame de Beauregard cackled every time that Monsieur de Latour brought in Julie's name, and was in a perfect ecstasy when he said, with ponderous courtesy:

"My only regret is that your niece, Mademoiselle de Brésac, is not of the party. Nothing would have given me more pleasure than to have entertained at the Chateau of Montplaisir, the ancestral seat of the De Latours, the daughter of the Vicomte de Brésac, who honoured me with his friendship."

"Oh," cried Mademoiselle Cheri innocently, "how pleased your father, the soap

boiler, would have been to see you in such grand company as this!"

Monsieur de Latour professed not to hear this speech, but listened rather to Madame de Beauregard, who was saying:

"It is a thousand pities, my dear man, that my niece is taking the mud baths at Carlsbad. You should know that girl."

Monsieur de Latour listened to this in silence, but looked toward Louis with an expression which said plainly, "I told you so!"

Tea was served on the terrace, and, after the manner of such affairs, Julie and Louis found themselves sitting next each other, while Mélanie and Eugène, some distance apart, yet exchanged timid, longing glances. Madame de Beauregard held her court at the tea-table. Monsieur Bertoux was a very silent man, who rarely opened his mouth except to put something in it, and seemed to accept quietly his position of a rod held *in terrorem* over Eugène de Contiac as a punishment for good behaviour.

The purple twilight fell and a faint young moon shimmered upon the sea in which the

large, palpitating stars were reflected. The daylight of late summer had gone before eight o'clock, when dinner was announced.

The dining-saloon, which a fortnight before had been a picture of gaunt neglect, was now resplendent. Shaded lamps and candles shone everywhere; pictures, mirrors, draperies covered the walls; the alleged Salvator Rosa had been removed and cast into the ash-heap. The table glittered with glass and silver, and was charmingly decorated with deep red roses, and an exquisite dinner was served. Everybody's spirits rose, including even those of the silent Monsieur Bertoux, who foresaw that he would make half a dozen wills for Madame de Beauregard before she left the Chateau of Montplaisir.

Toward the end of the dinner the butler handed a telegram to Monsieur de Latour. By permission of the ladies he opened it, and his countenance changed at once.

"This is outrageous!" he cried. "I telegraphed to Brionville expressly that no more soda was to be added to those sixteen vats of soap, and here they send me this answer:

"'Your despatch received. Have added soda, as directed, to sixteen vats.'

"I sent no such despatch, and if the people in the telegraph office sent such a one I shall claim heavy damages. That means sixteen vats of soap ruined!"

Then, excusing himself, Monsieur de Latour bustled off to the telephone, where he remained in angry colloquy with the telegraph office for ten minutes. Julie, meanwhile, seated next Louis, was quite smiling and at her ease. When Monsieur de Latour returned his brow was clouded, and as the ladies were leaving for the drawing-room where coffee was served, Monsieur de Latour politely but grimly requested Julie to remain.

"Certainly," replied Julie gaily, "but may your nephew, Monsieur Louis, remain, too? Because you look as if you would eat me up, and I am afraid to be left with you. And, besides, you are so fascinating that people may say I am trying to marry you, so I think we must have a chaperon."

"Just as you like, mademoiselle," replied

Monsieur de Latour in the crossest tone he had ever used to a young and pretty woman.

When he was left alone in the dining-room with Julie and Louis he began in a tone of profound vexation:

"My dear young lady, when I engaged you as my private secretary I knew that you had none of the qualifications which are usually required in that capacity, but I thought you could write a simple despatch at my dictation, especially when I warned you to be very careful. Now, in everything that you have written for me you have managed to get at least one word wrong."

"But only one word, monsieur," answered Julie, going and sitting down in a chair and helping herself to a bunch of grapes.

"But that one word has always produced a cataclysm. Do you see the result of leaving out one word in that despatch about the soda?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Julie, snipping off the grapes and handing some to Louis. "These are delicious grapes—I wonder if they are grown at Dinard? Yes, Monsieur de La-

tour, I dare say those telegraph people are right and I did leave out one word, but only one, and that such a little one."

"It was big enough to ruin sixteen vats of soap," tartly responded Monsieur de Latour.

He wished that Julie were not quite so pretty, and that he could keep his eyes off her pink fingers and rosy mouth as she disposed of the grapes.

"But I heard you say yourself, monsieur," she said, snipping off some more grapes and handing them to him, "that you never used soap—you always used white sand—so what does it matter about the sixteen vats?"

Monsieur de Latour groaned. Would he ever be able to make Julie understand the first principles of business? At the same time, the thought of parting with her was not agreeable to him—he enjoyed her society too much.

"Very well, mademoiselle," he said, trying to be stern. "All I have to say is that you must be more careful in the future. The notary will be here to-morrow, bringing the papers arranging matters between my nephew and myself, and, luckily, he will no doubt cor-

rect any blunders which you may have made in the copy which I dictated to you."

"I haven't made any blunders," cried Julie, laughing. "I wrote exactly what you dictated, and if there are any blunders they will be the notary's. Come, now, if you are through scolding me, let us go and have coffee with the rest."

Monsieur de Latour had meant to give her a tremendous wigging, but instead of that he found himself led, ostensibly by the arm and secretly by the nose, into the drawing-room, with Julie on his arm and Louis bringing up the rear.

As they entered the drawing-room, Julie joyfully proclaimed:

"Dear people, I have made the most amusing mistake this time. I have ruined sixteen vats of soap for Monsieur de Latour, and he, poor darling, takes it like an angel. But I won't do so any more, I promise you, monsieur."

"No, you won't, mademoiselle," replied Monsieur de Latour. "I sha'n't give you the chance."

And then, like the hospitable host he was, he proceeded to forget all about the sixteen vats of ruined soap, and they had a merry evening together, enlivened by Julie's songs at the piano.

VI

JULIE'S LITTLE MISTAKE

THE next day at twelve o'clock was the hour fixed for the signing of the papers making legal the adoption, by Monsieur de Latour, of Louis, and transferring to Louis's credit three hundred thousand francs in the Bank of France. All of the guests of the Chateau of Montplaisir were invited to assemble in the grand saloon to witness this important affair. The notary, with his clerk, arrived, the papers were brought out and examined, and Monsieur de Latour, with a gold pen, a pompous air, and a great flourish, signed his name. This was followed by Louis, who took the occasion to make a graceful speech of thanks to Monsieur de Latour, and to assure all present that he felt it an honour to be re-

lated to so upright and enterprising a citizen. Monsieur de Latour replied affectionately, and then, luncheon being served, hosts and guests drank to the health of the new head of the house of De Latour.

Monsieur de Latour was indeed a happy man. He had been officially made a gentleman, and he considered three hundred thousand francs a very small price to pay for the honour.

All were in high spirits, and even Mademoiselle Cheri forebore to utter some of those plain and rather unpleasing truths with which she had occasionally prodded Monsieur de Latour.

The ladies, after luncheon, retired for their siesta, the party arranging to meet on the terrace, as usual, at five o'clock for tea. Then Monsieur de Latour said to Louis:

"Now, my dear nephew, come with me into the grand saloon, and let us talk over our future arrangements, and I should be obliged to you, Mademoiselle de Courcey, if you will come, too, as I may need your services as amanuensis."

"Certainly," replied Julie, "but first let me go and curl my hair. This damp climate takes all the curl out."

Monsieur de Latour was a little annoyed at this, especially in the presence of Mademoiselle Cheri, who said nothing but saw everything. However, it would be a bold man who would refuse permission to a young lady to curl her hair, and so Monsieur de Latour merely asked Julie's presence as soon as convenient.

In the grand saloon he unlocked the escritoire in which the papers had been stowed, and taking them out began to go over them for the second time with Louis. All at once Monsieur de Latour started and turned pale.

"Why, look here," he said, "I didn't notice this before, but instead of me, Victor Louis de Latour, adopting you, Louis Victor de Latour, here I see—" At this point Monsieur de Latour stopped, paled, and with a shaking finger pointed to the impressive legal paper with its great seals.

And there, sure enough, as plain as print,

Louis Victor de Latour had adopted Victor Louis de Latour. Louis examined the paper carefully and laid it down. Monsieur de Latour, running his hands frantically through his scanty hair, cried out:

"It is all the work of that good-for-nothing Julie, who is now upstairs curling her hair. Well, it will have to be changed—that's all. The fact is, she has never yet written a letter or prepared a document for me that she has not got one word wrong. But she is so devilish pretty and so fascinating and such a delightful little scamp altogether that there is no being angry with her. However, I shall give her a good scolding for this, and the work will all have to be done over again."

Louis during all this had sat calmly examining the papers spread out before him. His silence aroused Monsieur de Latour's suspicions.

"Of course," cried the old soap boiler, advancing and mopping his brow, "you see the necessity for undoing this nonsensical performance. You being my uncle, indeed!"

"I don't know about that," replied Louis

coolly. "First let me ask you one question. Are you really in love with Mademoiselle Julie?"

The query staggered Monsieur de Latour, and he sat down quickly, as if some one had hit him a blow on the forehead.

"Well," he said after a moment, "I don't know whether I am or not, but one thing is certain—I intend to have the benefit of her society. It has occurred to me several times in the last few days that you were paying Mademoiselle de Courcey rather more attention than was necessary, and it was distinctly displeasing to me."

"That settles it," replied Louis gravely. "These papers stand. I cannot forego the honour of being uncle to such a nephew as yourself. I am proud of you, my dear Victor."

Here Louis rose and patted Monsieur de Latour patronisingly on the back.

"It is not your money that I desire—that you are more than welcome to—but to say to the world that I have such a nephew as yourself gives me the highest pleasure."

"Go to the devil!" bawled Monsieur de

Latour, jumping up. "You are the most impudent, presumptuous dog I ever saw in my life. I your nephew, indeed!"

"But I thought you wanted to appear young so as to win favour, perhaps, in Mademoiselle Julie's eyes."

"So I do, but not so infernally and ridiculously young as you would make me appear."

"Not at all. I might have a brother forty years older than myself, and you might be that brother's son."

"And I might elope with my great-grandfather's sister-in-law," bellowed Monsieur de Latour, "but we are not talking about such things as that. What I mean to say is that this ridiculous mistake must be rectified. I am willing to adopt you as my nephew—in fact, I am rather pleased to be related to you, because I have learned to like you in spite of your assaults upon my ribs. I am willing to be your uncle, but I am not willing to be your nephew."

"My dear boy, the thing is done. It is signed, sealed, and delivered. You are my nephew, and you can't help yourself. And

remember that the arrangement carries with it the authority of a parent—for example, you cannot marry anybody without my consent. Our laws, you know, are very specific on that point."

"Oh, yes, I know, but you are talking nonsense!"

"Am I? Then try to contravene my authority and see what will happen!"

Monsieur de Latour glared at Louis. And just then the door opened and Julie entered, looking, if possible, prettier than ever.

"Now," she said to Monsieur de Latour, "I am ready to do anything you ask me—that is, for half an hour, when I expect the dressmaker—then I shall have to leave you."

"Certainly," answered Monsieur de Latour, laughing sardonically. "Between the hairdresser and the dressmaker, you may occasionally condescend to assist me. Thank you very much, mademoiselle. I am indebted to you, I think, for the present piece of work."

He got up and, in his wrath taking Julie sternly by the arm, pointed with an accusing finger at the document.

"Do you see," he thundered, "that through that little peculiarity of yours by which you always get one word wrong——"

"But only one word, monsieur, and then always a very small one."

"Yes, I know, but big enough to do the business. Here you see that instead of Victor Louis de Latour adopting Louis Victor de Latour, it is completely turned around, and this young scapegrace has adopted me. Do you understand?"

In his rage Monsieur de Latour's voice had risen to a roar, but Julie, glancing at the paper and then at Louis, burst into a ripple of laughter.

"Oh, how amusing!" she cried. "It is the most delightful thing I ever heard. Did I make that mistake?"

"You did!" shouted Monsieur de Latour, quite forgetting himself and actually shaking Julie's arm.

"Well, what's the harm?" she asked, breathless with the shaking and laughing still more. "You are just as much a De Latour of the Chateau of Montplaisir, monsieur, as

you ever were. I thought that was the great point."

Monsieur de Latour flung her into a chair as if she had been a parcel, and strode up and down the room.

"My dear Victor," said Louis soothingly, "compose yourself. Have confidence in me, your uncle, and believe that everything that I shall do will be with an eye for your advantage. If you should require me to give back the three hundred thousand francs——"

"Oh, yes, give them back, indeed!" bawled Monsieur de Latour, going and standing before Louis. "You can afford to give them back because you practically have the control of all my property."

"I sha'n't interfere with that, my boy," replied Louis. "I think you know how to manage your money matters very much better than I do. It is only your personal conduct in which I shall concern myself, and, by the way, I think it would be best for you to dispense with Mademoiselle de Courcey's services as private secretary."

"What have you to do with my private secretary?"

"Everything. I am your legal guardian, and I cannot allow you to continue what I thought from the first a very indiscreet arrangement. So, mademoiselle, I shall be pleased myself to engage your services at the same figure my nephew paid you, if you will accept the place."

"Certainly!" responded Julie, jumping up.

Monsieur de Latour's rage and chagrin at this was indescribable. He ground his teeth, and his scanty hair appeared actually to bristle with wrath. Meanwhile, Louis was smiling and imperturbable, and Julie was a picture of innocence.

"Only I shall stipulate," continued Louis gravely, "that you are not to do any writing for me. I can't take the risk."

"Sixteen vats of soap spoiled!" interjected Monsieur de Latour, throwing himself into a chair.

"My dear Victor," said Louis, "would you oblige me by allowing me a few min-

utes' private conversation with Mademoiselle Julie?"

"What?" screamed Monsieur de Latour.

"A few minutes' private conversation is what I ask."

"Not under any circumstances."

Monsieur de Latour was so beside himself with rage that he could not keep still, but, jumping up from his chair, bounced about the room.

"Then, mademoiselle," remarked Louis, "I must ask you to step out with me upon the terrace for a moment."

"Mademoiselle, I forbid you to go!" cried Monsieur de Latour.

But to this Julie paid no attention whatever, and followed Louis through the glass door that opened on the terrace. Once out in the clear and brilliant sunshine, Louis whispered in her ear:

"Did you do it on purpose?"

And Julie whispered back:

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"And was it because his consent was necessary to your marriage?"

Julie nodded her head and gave Louis her bewitching side glance.

"Very well, he shall remain my nephew until he has consented to our marriage."

Julie bestowed upon Louis another side glance, a look of overpowering sweetness which ran like wine through Louis's whole being. Monsieur de Latour, within the room, saw this exchange of tender and vivid glances, and a flood of light poured in upon him. He dashed out upon the terrace, almost knocking them over.

"Oh, I see how it is!" he cried. "You two are in a conspiracy against me. You"—pointing to Louis—"want to marry Mademoiselle de Courcey."

"Oh, no," replied Louis, "I want to marry Mademoiselle de Brésac!" And taking Julie's hand he placed it within his arm.

Slowly the truth dawned upon Monsieur de Latour. He struck his forehead.

"I see it all," he groaned. "It is a trick. You are Julie de Brésac. Strange I never suspected it before. But that old gadabout, your aunt, put you up to it, no doubt. Very well,

all I have to say is that, under your respected father's will, my consent is necessary to your marriage, and you won't get that consent to marry my nephew."

"Your uncle, you mean," interposed Louis.

"Very well, very well!" cried Monsieur de Latour, walking off, quivering with rage. "You will see how it will turn out."

Louis followed him.

"Now, my dear nephew," he said in a pacifying tone, "don't let us, with guests in the house, have a family row—these things are very bad form. It has never been the custom of the De Latours to do such things, and if you wish to prove yourself a genuine De Latour you must follow the traditions of the house. Now, it isn't necessary to say how things really stand—I am willing to let you pose as my uncle, provided you show me the respect which is due me. So let us agree to say nothing about this, but I will have no interference between Mademoiselle Julie and myself."

Monsieur de Latour paused and reflected for a whole minute.

"Perhaps you know," he said, "that the Comtesse de Beauregard's consent is necessary, as well as mine, for anyone to marry Julie."

"I believe so, but that is very easily won. Just let me go on a gigantic lark and the old lady will consent at once."

"Yes, but suppose she should marry? She might marry me, you know!"

"That will make our relationship still more interesting. You would be my nephew and at the same time you would be my uncle."

"Don't talk nonsense. What I mean is that I intend to checkmate you and that headstrong girl yonder."

"But to marry Madame de Beauregard you would have to lead a very dissipated life, and then I should be in a position to checkmate you. I can exert my authority as your uncle, and put a stop to your wild career on the ground that you are squandering your fortune. I can put you on an allowance of a thousand francs a month. How would you like that?'

"Oh, it's all a confounded muddle," cried Monsieur de Latour, "but I intend to block your game, young man, with Julie, and you see if I don't!"

While this turmoil was taking place in one part of the chateau a like one was occurring in another part of it. Just as luncheon was over General Granier's card was brought in, and Madame de Beauregard insisted upon the rest of the party going with her to the orangery. There they found General Granier, who began to entertain them with anecdotes of some of his most notorious escapades during the Second Empire, varied with the recital of some startling indiscretions about three months before. His stories were really amusing, and even Mademoiselle Cheri laughed at them; but Mélanie, much scandalised, maintained a shocked silence, and Eugène de Contiac unconsciously did the same.

When General Granier had finished a story of having kissed a dowager duchess in mistake for her daughter-in-law, a story which sent Madame de Beauregard into convulsions of mirth, she suddenly looked around and

caught Eugène in the act of handing a book to Mélanie. Madame de Beauregard seized it and read aloud the title, "Sermons and Discourses, by Bossuet." From screams of laughter the old lady suddenly flew into a temper, and, giving Eugène a smart clip over the head with the book of sermons, she cried wrathfully:

"I will teach you to be reading sermons in good company! And what's this?"

A sheet of paper fluttered out, which the old lady caught deftly and read aloud:

"DEAREST MELANIE:

"Don't believe for one moment that my heart or my inclinations are in the dissipations which I sometimes follow. It is all the doing of my intolerable old aunt and that old rip, General Granier. My darling, as soon as my aunt is dead and I can follow my own inclinations you will have no fault to find with me. Even without your influence, dearest, I would wish to live a pious and God-fearing life. How much more so when you encourage me in those religious observances of which I am deprived! However, my old aunt can't live forever, and when she is gone, and we can be married, rest assured that I shall lead with you a life of prayer and piety, with sermons for our only literature and church-going our dissipa-

tion. My aunt has not a bad heart, and let us unite in prayer, dear one, that she may mend her ways.

"Devotedly yours,

"EUGÈNE DE CONTIAC."

This was a letter calculated to exasperate a much milder person than Madame de Beauregard, and the old lady, although in general good-tempered, as most old reprobates are, was kindled into wrath. She sat up, whirled around in her chair, rose, and actually danced with rage.

"So you are planning to be pious when I am dead and buried!" she shrieked, shaking the unlucky letter in poor Eugène's pallid face. "Very well, then, you and your saintly friend here can be pious on nothing at all. You and this sanctimonious minx will unite in prayer for me! Just let me catch you at it—that's all I ask! Oh, if I had but a man in my family, he should have every franc I possess! Monsieur Bertoux," she cried, turning to the silent advocate, who saw a good fee staring him in the face for making another will for Madame de Beauregard, "I desire you this minute to make another will for me!"

At this Monsieur Bertoux quietly took out some sheets of legal-looking paper.

"Here, madame," he said resignedly, "I always keep myself prepared, and I knew when I arrived here yesterday and saw the situation of affairs that I should be called upon to make a will for you before the week was out. Will you, as usual, when you cut Monsieur de Contiac off, give your property to found a hospital for cats and dogs?"

"Yes," answered Madame de Beauregard promptly, "except one hundred thousand francs to General Granier, as the last man with red blood in him who is left alive in France. He deserves a legacy and he shall have it, for knowing how to enjoy himself as a man should."

General Granier bowed to the ground and said gallantly:

"I hope, madame, that I shall never come into the possession of that legacy. I should be far more pleased if you would consider the proposition which I have made to you at intervals for the last forty years." Here the

general put his hand to his heart and winked sentimentally at Madame de Beauregard.

"Marry you, you mean?" cried Madame de Beauregard. "Well, I have been considering it for forty years, as you say. But meanwhile I intend to punish my nephew—not that he appears to have a drop of my blood in him—so, Monsieur Bertoux, will you please to come into the grand saloon with me, and we will arrange this matter. And I beg to inform you, mademoiselle," she added to the shrinking Mélanie, "that you may marry my nephew any time you like, and you will get a pious husband—and I could not desire you any worse punishment, for pious husbands are a terrible bore. I had one myself and I don't propose to have another of that sort."

Madame de Beauregard marched off to the saloon, escorted by Monsieur Bertoux and General Granier. Mademoiselle Cheri, Mélanie, and Eugène remained in the orangery. Eugène, like most men who have just lost a half million francs, looked a little frightened. Not so Mélanie. Extending her hand to him, she said with a kind of timid boldness:

"I care nothing for the fortune you have lost. It is you that I love, and when I feel that you have perhaps secured your eternal salvation by giving up that money, it is in my heart to render thanks for losing it."

Eugène was scarcely then equal to rendering thanks for the loss of a half million francs, but he was sincerely in love with Mélanie, and her disinterested affection touched him deeply. And he could tell her with perfect truth, as he did, that any loss of money was trifling so long as he retained her love.

Mademoiselle Cheri, who was the most indulgent person in the world to lovers and children, considerately left the orangery and was walking up and down the terrace, leaving Eugène and Mélanie practically alone under the green shade of the orange trees. The two stood hand in hand and were forgetful of all the world but themselves. It seemed to them but a few minutes that they were alone together, while it was really a half-hour.

Their Elysian dream was rudely interrupted by Monsieur de Latour bouncing in upon them. Monsieur de Latour had been

very much tried that day, and this last straw had brought his wrath to the boiling pitch. So he bawled at the two young culprits:

"Well, I have just seen Madame de Beauregard, and she is having another will made as fast as Monsieur Bertoux can write it, and so you have lost between you by your folly five hundred thousand francs which you could have easily retained." And then addressing Eugène: "What do a few escapades and a little dissipation matter with half a million francs to be gained by it? But no, you want to thank God that you are better than other men, and you have been rightly served by Madame de Beauregard. All I have to say is that you are to give up immediately any idea you may have of marrying my niece. Half an hour ago you were a very desirable match—now you are not a match in a marriageable sense at all. Mélanie, let go of his hand!"

For as even a dove strives to defend her nest, Mélanie only held on the more to Eugène's hand.

"Would you have me give him up because

he strives to be good and pleases me thereby?" she asked, trembling.

"I certainly should!" roared Monsieur de Latour.

Eugène, not to be less courageous than Mélanie, replied firmly:

"Mademoiselle, although I cannot ask you now to share my poverty, rest assured that I am yours forever."

"Ah, Eugène," said Mélanie timidly, "perhaps by waiting— My uncle cannot really mean to separate us, knowing how much we love each other."

"But I *shall* separate you!" shouted Monsieur de Latour, "and you will see, young man, whether I do or not."

At this Louis's voice was heard over Monsieur de Latour's shoulder.

"My dear nephew," he said, "what kind of language is this that you are using? I am simply shocked at you. Would you part two young hearts that beat only for each other?"

"Certainly I would," angrily responded Monsieur de Latour, wheeling around on Louis.

"Luckily," remarked Louis coolly, "it is not in your power. Under the articles of my adoption of you as a nephew you cannot do anything of this character without my consent, and I don't intend to allow you to separate Mademoiselle Mélanie and Monsieur de Contiac." And then he briefly explained that he had adopted Monsieur de Latour instead of Monsieur de Latour adopting him. Turning to Monsieur de Latour, Louis continued: "The fact is, Victor, you have no experience with the master passion. The love of two young hearts cannot be treated like the boiling soap in a couple of vats. You are dealing with an unknown quantity when you try to control the emotions of the soul. It is fortunate that you are enough under my authority to prevent you from interfering either with Mademoiselle Mélanie's love affair or with the tender attachment which I feel for Mademoiselle Julie and which she does me the honour to accept."

"Do you mean to say, you upstart—?" thundered Monsieur de Latour.

"Come, come, Victor, that kind of lan-

guage is totally unsuited to our relationship. Remember, you are my nephew."

"The devil I am! It's the most arrant nonsense I ever heard in my life."

"Will you go and ask Monsieur Bertoux what he thinks of it?"

"Oh, I know it's all legal, but it's simply maddening! However"—addressing Mélanie and Eugène in a menacing manner—"don't you two young hypocrites take this gentleman too seriously about this adoption business. First let us see how it will work."

"I," said Louis, with much dignity, "advise you, mademoiselle, and you, Monsieur de Contiac, to take it with the utmost seriousness, as I mean to enforce all the rights of my position. And among other things, I apologise for the behaviour of my nephew. You are our joint guests, and I beg you will forget everything that has been said. My nephew has not yet learned the lesson of self-control, but I hope to teach it to him. We shall all have until five o'clock to compose ourselves, and by that time I hope my nephew will have arrived at a better frame of mind. Come,

Victor," and with that he seized Monsieur de Latour by the arm and dragged him off, spluttering:

"It's maddening, simply maddening!"

Monsieur de Latour, shaking himself free, retired to his own room to ponder over the topsy-turvy condition of affairs. The more he pondered the more puzzling the situation seemed to him. Julie, he realised, was out of his reach, and the vision of a young and pretty girl as his partner for the rest of his life seemed less attractive when he reflected upon the complications that Julie's youth and inexperience had brought upon him. His association with Madame de Beauregard, and with the persons of high-sounding names to whom she had introduced him, including even the semi-royal duke during that alarming experience in the autocar, had fostered extremely his natural taste for aristocratic society, and it really seemed to him as if he were throwing himself away if he should marry Mademoiselle Cheri.

Just at that moment he glanced out of his window and saw a superb carriage with a

ducal crest upon it turning into the court-yard, and from it descended the semi-royal duke. Madame de Beauregard appeared in person on the terrace to greet her visitor. He was a portly, red-faced old gentleman, apparently of the same vintage as Madame de Beauregard herself.

Monsieur de Latour, watching the scene from his window, felt his chest swell at the thought of entertaining such distinguished guests. It is true that the duke had been upon the autocar expedition, but Monsieur de Latour had been so frightened on that occasion as they whizzed and banged along that he really remembered very little about the duke.

The conversation of Madame de Beauregard and the duke floated up to Monsieur de Latour's window, and he could not forbear listening to the clear, gay voices on the terrace.

Madame de Beauregard, who treated dukes and costermongers alike, received this particular duke with great familiarity, and began to pour out to him the story of her grievances against Eugène de Contiac and

modern men in general, at which the duke chuckled in a semi-royal way.

"Here," cried Madame de Beauregard, snapping her bright old eyes, "I am the guest of Monsieur de Latour, a soap-boiling man, but I like him. There is not half as much difference as the world thinks between you people, with sixteen quarterings, and a soap-boiler after he is washed and combed and well dressed. And this old soap-boiler has some spirit in him—I suppose he might be considered quite a desperate character in these milk-and-water days. But he isn't a patch on you, my dear duke, for example, nor on General Granier, and when you are dead there will be no more men left alive."

The semi-royal duke grinned, and remarked that he had no intention of dying yet awhile.

"Nor have I!" cried Madame de Beauregard. "I expect to spend the season of 1940 at Dinard. Do you remember, my dear duke, the season of 1860 at Deauville? Oh, they were days then when one lived! We had no rheumatism, we had all our own teeth,

and we could go the pace by night as well as by day."

"My dear madame," replied the duke, who really had quite a gentlemanly air when he chose, "you are to-day as young in feelings, in energy and in looks as you were in 1860."

"Oh, you old rogue!" cried Madame de Beauregard, playfully prodding the duke with her fan, "how can you tell such taradiddles? Well, I can't say that you are as young as you were in 1860, but I will say that you have more life in you than ten young men of to-day."

Monsieur de Latour, watching and listening from his bedroom window, turned pale. The idea of such language and such prodding applied to any man with a ducal title was bad enough, but to a duke who figured in the Almanach de Gotha!

"There is something in blood, after all," thought Monsieur de Latour, watching Madame de Beauregard's ease and sprightliness; "but I believe that woman would chuck an archbishop under the chin, and tweak a cardinal's ear, if she wanted to."

The duke, however, who had known Madame de Beauregard for fifty years, settled himself quite comfortably to hear the present generation abused and his own lauded.

"The fact is, madame," he said, "the young people of the present day are too correct by half."

"Quite right you are," replied Madame de Beauregard with emphasis. "Now, there is my nephew, Eugène de Contiac. You know my troubles with that young man. Well, now he is behaving worse than ever. He is in love with the soap-boiler's niece, who is a shade more pious than Eugène. The minx actually tells him that she will marry him without a franc if he continues pious, and won't look at him if he doesn't, even if I give him half a million francs. However, my mind is made up that no godly young man shall get any of my money. In 1860 there weren't any pious young men, were there, duke?"

Madame de Beauregard rattled on in her shrill, high-pitched voice for the benefit of everybody within half a mile, and Monsieur

de Latour, who could not help hearing, listened to the names of princes, kings, and even emperors handled in the most familiar manner, and getting the general impression that in 1860 Madame de Beauregard and the semi-royal duke were engaged in one long, loud, and uproarious romp with half the royal personages in Europe. This was not without its effect on the retired soap-boiler, and his mind returned to the half-formed scheme of marrying the old lady herself. The duke paid a long visit, and by the time he went away the purple dusk was falling.

In spite of the exciting occurrences of the day the whole party met at dinner with outward composure and even gaiety. Monsieur de Latour, however, was considerably annoyed by the tone of paternal authority which Louis adopted toward him, and by the gibes of Madame de Beauregard at the situation which had been reversed.

"So it was that little baggage Julie who did it all?" the old lady chuckled, indicating Julie, who sat at the table and looked as innocent as the cat that had eaten the canary.

"To tell you the truth, Monsieur de Latour, I don't believe she made the mistake in the name through inadvertence. I think that she meant to put you in Monsieur Louis de Latour's power."

"But it is preposterous!" burst out Monsieur de Latour.

"If you think so," replied Louis coolly, "try to break the arrangement and see where you are."

And then everybody at the table laughed, and Monsieur de Latour, boiling and spluttering with rage, yet had to control himself and smile a ghastly smile.

And so the old lady had countenanced the trick his ward had played upon him! But he still held on to the three hundred thousand francs, and there would be no question of Julie and Louis marrying without it. It seemed to Monsieur de Latour that he had Louis in quite as much of a hole as Louis had him.

The visit of the semi-royal duke made a great impression upon Monsieur de Latour, and he began to consider seriously how he

might contrive to marry Madame de Beauregard. He concluded that the best and only way was to enter upon a series of larks of the wildest description, and began to turn over in his mind plans to that effect.

As a preliminary Monsieur de Latour invited the whole party, including Monsieur Bertoux, to remain for the rest of the month at the chateau, and in this Louis cordially concurred, and they all accepted. Madame de Beauregard knew everybody worth knowing at Dinard, and the old lady, in spite of her peculiarities, was much sought after as a person of great consequence. The terrace of the chateau was gay with guests every afternoon at tea time. Mademoiselle Cheri and Mélanie were very well pleased at the opportunity of seeing a phase of society hitherto unknown in their secluded and provincial lives, but Mademoiselle Cheri, unlike Monsieur de Latour, was not in the least overawed by it.

Duchesses, princesses, and countesses, with the gentlemen in their train, came every afternoon, on Madame de Beauregard's invitation,

to the terrace, for the old lady's idea of life was one long, unintermittent frolic. But Monsieur de Latour was so dazzled by the names of the people, to say nothing of their equipages and servants, that his head was completely turned. To be the head of the house of De Latour had seemed to him, the month before, the acme of distinction, but now he longed to be the Comte de Beauregard, a title which he would acquire if he succeeded in marrying Madame de Beauregard.

The only serious rival he had was General Granier, with his extremely interesting leg and his repertoire of escapades, and his large assortment of delightfully scandalous stories. Monsieur de Latour could in no way pretend to rival him in these particulars. How tame and correct seemed his life at Brionville! He grew positively ashamed of its tameness and correctness, and longed to prove that he had in him the making of a dreadfully dissipated character.

Moreover, he was checked at every turn by Louis, who, with the coolest assumption

and most ineffable impudence, undertook to treat him like a schoolboy. It was in vain that he threatened Louis with the loss of the prospective three hundred thousand francs and the promise of withholding consent from Louis's marriage to Julie. Louis snapped his fingers at the three hundred thousand francs, which he declared to be a mere trifle compared with Julie's love. And as for the question of Monsieur de Latour's consent—ah, there was a complication indeed! Louis had studied carefully the legal aspects of his adoption of Monsieur de Latour instead of Monsieur de Latour's adoption of him, and the threat of attempting to enforce them and compelling Monsieur de Latour to appear in court as his adopted nephew made the old gentleman extremely uncomfortable. Louis absolutely undertook to cut down Monsieur de Latour's allowance of champagne at dinner and cigars afterward, tried to force him to go to bed at ten o'clock, and urged him to lead as correct a life as that of Eugène de Contiac.

Monsieur de Latour, turning these things

over in his mind, determined to make a break for liberty, not only for his own satisfaction but as a means of recommending himself to Madame de Beauregard, and he thought:

"If I can get that milksop of a nephew of hers to come with me and make a man of him, the Comtesse de Beauregard will be sure to look upon me with an eye of favour, and perhaps, as he and Mélanie are determined to be married some time or other, I can secure for him the half-million francs which Madame de Beauregard promises to give him, provided he turns from good to gay. And after all, what Eugène said in that unlucky letter about being as pious as he pleased after Madame de Beauregard is dead and gone is perfectly true, and Mélanie can have that happiness to which every woman aspires—that of reforming a man."

Filled with these notions Monsieur de Latour, one morning about a fortnight after the arrival of his guests at the chateau, carried off to his bedroom Eugène de Contiac, and, after double-locking the door, seated himself for a confidential interview. Eugène himself had

drooped somewhat in spirits, as a man will who has just lost half a million francs. He had begun to consider if there were not some means by which he could get his legacy, have his allowance restored, and still keep on terms with Mélanie, having a fixed determination to become pious again as soon as he dared to be. Monsieur de Latour, surmising what was passing in Eugène's mind, unfolded a plan to him.

"My dear fellow," said he, confidentially, "I think you made a mistake in throwing away that half-million francs. It doesn't seem impossible that you should have your legacy and your allowance restored and marry my niece, for she certainly fancies you—God knows why! Now, Madame de Beauregard can't live forever."

"Oh, yes, she will!" groaned Eugène. "She is good for forty years yet. She will live to bury all of us and be skipping around here until she meets the fate of the old lady who died at the age of one hundred and ten of a fall from a cherry-tree."

"Well," said Monsieur de Latour, going

closer and dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper, "perhaps—ahem!—there are certain secrets of the heart—it's rather embarrassing to speak of these things—but—it is possible that I may become a candidate for Madame de Beauregard's hand."

"Marry her, do you mean?" cried Eugène, falling back in his chair. "Good Heavens! If I were in your place I would rather marry a whole circus than my aunt. Yet she is not a bad woman; but for pure friskiness there never was anything like her."

"I agree with you perfectly, but I am a little frisky myself. Now, I have a proposition to make to you. Suppose you and I go to Paris for a week with the express purpose of having a little lark of the sort Madame de Beauregard would like. I believe it would certainly end in her restoring your legacy and allowance, and might—ahem!—incline her favourably to listen to the proposition which I am contemplating making her. If only General Granier, with that infernal leg of his, were out of the way! But she seems never

tired of listening to stories of what he can do with that leg—shoot rabbits, play cards, and actually play the piano with it. And he eighty years of age if he is a day! That man and Madame de Beauregard have found the fountain of eternal youth and friskiness."

"But Mélanie?" asked Eugène anxiously. "She is devoted to me now; but if I should spend such a week in Paris as you desire I am sure she would never speak to me."

"Oh, yes, she would! She would have the pleasure of reforming you again, and that is a joy which a woman cannot repeat too often. No, my dear fellow, don't think that for a moment. Go down on your knees to Mélanie, tell her you are sorry for what you have done, then—get up and do it again. That's what women all like."

There was something enticing to Eugène in all this, and after an hour's urgent representation he finally consented to make the visit to Paris with Monsieur de Latour. That night at dinner Monsieur de Latour announced their intended excursion.

"And I promise you," he said significantly

to Madame de Beauregard, who sat at his right, "that when we come back we shall have some tales to tell!"

"I do hope so," piously ejaculated Madame de Beauregard.

VII

A MERRY WEEK IN PARIS

ONE week from the day that Monsieur de Latour and Eugène left for Paris they were sitting in Monsieur de Latour's study in the Chateau of Montplaisir, absolute wrecks of their former selves. Monsieur de Latour was the colour of a mustard plaster, his eyes were bloodshot, his hand trembled, and as he lay back in an arm-chair he seemed scarcely able to raise his head. Eugène, sitting at the other end of the room, leaned forward, supporting his aching head upon his shaking hands. At intervals a long, shuddering sigh burst from him, which was answered by a loud groan from Monsieur de Latour. Presently Eugène spoke in a scarcely audible voice:

"I wouldn't spend such another week as the last for half a million francs."

"And I," groaned Monsieur de Latour from the other end of the room, "would give half a million francs for another head and a new stomach."

There was a silence after this, broken by Eugène saying in a sepulchral voice, "Oh, my head!"

To which Monsieur de Latour responded in tones of agony, "Oh, my head!"

Then there was a longer silence still.

"Do you know how much it cost?" asked Eugène.

"No," replied Monsieur de Latour. "All I know is I used up all the cheques in my cheque-book, and when I got to the station here I didn't have enough money to pay the cabman to bring us to the chateau." And he groaned dismally.

While they sat in gloom and miserable silence the door suddenly flew open and in bounced Madame de Beauregard, carrying a newspaper in her hand.

"Oh, you two darlings!" she cried, blow-

ing a kiss to Monsieur de Latour and throwing her arm around Eugène's aching head, "how delightfully you have been behaving! It has been in the newspapers for three days past. I was so pleased that I made Monsieur Bertoux not only make me a new will, but directed him to pay to my nephew's credit in bank one-half of his legacy, that is, two hundred and fifty thousand francs, in cash."

Eugène felt feebly in his pocket.

"Yes, I believe I did get a letter or something from Monsieur Bertoux, but I was not in a state to understand it exactly. Here it is."

He took the letter out and read it—a brief communication saying that Monsieur Bertoux had, by the direction of Madame de Beauregard, placed two hundred and fifty thousand francs to Eugène's credit at his Paris banker's.

"And now," cried Madame de Beauregard, shaking him, "aren't you perfectly delighted?"

Eugène shook his head dolefully.

"If you had my head!" he replied.

Madame de Beauregard shrieked with laughter at this.

"And how about your head, monsieur?" she asked of Monsieur de Latour.

"It feels about the size of the Eiffel Tower," gasped Monsieur de Latour.

This delighted the old lady still more.

"Now," she cried, "I will tell you what the newspapers say. It is all about your visit to the races. They say that the two of you went out, escorting nineteen ballet-girls, and before you left you had paid for one hundred and twenty-seven bottles of champagne, and that two of the young ladies—he! he!—gave you, monsieur, a footbath in champagne—ha! ha!"

"They took off my shoes and stockings, and before they got through I was wet to my shirt with champagne."

"Why, that almost makes me fall in love with you! And then the police came along——"

"I wish they had come before," murmured Eugène sadly.

"—and tried to arrest you, and the ballet-

girls smuggled you and Eugène out of the way, and you jumped into a twenty-thousand-franc racing machine——"

"It cost me thirty thousand francs before I got through with it," interjected Monsieur de Latour.

"—and ran it into a ditch, and smashed the machine all to bits, and you fought the police——"

"Look at the back of my neck!" said Monsieur de Latour, displaying a number of bumps and bruises.

"—and got yourselves arrested, and by some sort of hocus-pocus——"

"It was ten thousand francs' worth of hocus-pocus," said Eugène in a tired voice.

"—managed to go free. And you sat up all the next night playing cards and losing money——"

"We did that for six nights," replied Monsieur de Latour, "and we weren't playing cards all the time. I lost twelve thousand francs on a bet that more flies would alight on my lump of sugar than on another man's. But we played cards, too."

"In short," cackled the old lady, "you must have had a most delightful week."

This remark was received in melancholy silence. After a pause Monsieur de Latour said wearily:

"It seems to me about ten weeks since we left this place for Paris."

"And remember," cried Madame de Beauregard, chucking Monsieur de Latour under the chin, "that's the kind of a life you will be expected to lead all the time if I conclude to marry you."

At which Monsieur de Latour shook his head in a manner which did not indicate unmitigated joy at the prospect.

"And," continued Madame de Beauregard merrily, "you have succeeded in making General Granier insanely jealous. He hasn't money to go the pace as you do—in fact, he never had. He makes no secret of his determination to run you out of the field, because Granier, poor angel, really wants to marry me."

Monsieur de Latour at that moment would have run out of the field without any assistance whatever from General Granier.

Madame de Beauregard remained half an hour longer in the company of her host and her nephew, getting the particulars of what she called their charming week in Paris out of the two unfortunates. Every detail of agony they gave delighted her more and more. Their encounters with the police, their sleepless nights and exciting days, their expeditions, their falls into gutters and being dragged out again, their encounters with cabmen and chauffeurs, ballet-dancers and the like, gave her exquisite pleasure, and when she skipped out it was with the assurance to Monsieur de Latour that she really felt herself falling in love with him, and was afraid to stay longer for fear she should kiss him against his will.

As she left the room a servant appeared with a message from Louis, which was delivered with much hesitation. It was a request that Monsieur de Latour should wait upon him in the saloon.

"Go to the devil!" was Monsieur de Latour's response.

In a few minutes Louis appeared, and go-

ing up to the great chair where Monsieur de Latour, as limp as a rag, lay, said to him in a voice of stern reproof:

"My dear Victor, your conduct in Paris is known to me, and I have not language strong enough to condemn it. What do you suppose my feelings are, as your uncle, when I hear of these outrageous performances, dragging the name of De Latour into the newspapers, and misconducting yourself in general?"

Monsieur de Latour felt very ill and disinclined to exert himself, but the tone of admonition on Louis's part roused the old gentleman to a pitch of great anger.

"Come, now, young man," he bawled, "you may stop this tomfoolery. Whatever I have done, I don't choose to be corrected by a youngster like yourself."

"Remember," replied Louis in a voice of awful warning, "I am your uncle."

"The devil you are! Well, uncle or no uncle, I propose to do as I like, and if I please to have a little lark in Paris——"

"A little lark!" Louis threw his hands up.

"—in conjunction with my young friend, De Contiac, here, who, I must say, incited me to most of the gaieties in which we indulged, I shall do it without any reference to you or anybody else."

At this poor Eugène raised his pallid face from his hands, in which it had sunk, and said in a sepulchral voice:

"*I* incited you to gaieties?"

"Well, well," answered Monsieur de Latour testily, "it doesn't make any difference —we incited each other."

"I wish I could believe you," said Louis, "but I am sure that you were chiefly responsible. As a result of your improper conduct, your niece, Mademoiselle Mélanie, is in the very deepest distress, chiefly on account of Monsieur de Contiac's share in your performances, and she demands an interview, a final one, with Monsieur de Contiac. She awaits you," continued Louis, turning to Eugène, "in the saloon with Mademoiselle Cheri."

Eugène tried to rise from his chair, but sank back exhausted.

"I can't move," he said. "I thought I would never reach the chateau alive. I believe three days more of the racket would have killed me."

"Then," promptly said Louis, "Mademoiselle Mélanie and Mademoiselle Cheri will no doubt come to you here when they know the circumstances."

At this poor Eugène absolutely burst into tears, while Louis, ringing the bell, directed the servant to request Mademoiselle Cheri and Mademoiselle Mélanie to do him the favour of coming to Monsieur de Latour's study. While awaiting them Louis improved the occasion by lecturing Monsieur de Latour on the impropriety of his conduct, a proceeding which lashed Monsieur de Latour to fury.

In a few minutes Mademoiselle Cheri appeared with Mélanie. The poor girl was dissolved in tears, and it was a pitiable sight as she sank into a chair near Eugène, both of them weeping bitterly. Between her sobs Mélanie could only say, "All is over between us—all is over between us."

"But he has two hundred and fifty thou-

sand francs, mademoiselle," put in Louis, whose goodness of heart made him wish to befriend the unhappy lovers. "Monsieur Bertoux, who secretly sympathises with you, induced Madame de Beauregard to let him deposit the money to your credit in bank. The old lady was so pleased with your indiscretions, monsieur, and so confident you would never reform, that she directed Monsieur Bertoux to do it, so you may reform and have the two hundred and fifty thousand francs as well."

"He will never reform," wailed Mélanie, "and we must part. O Eugène, how could you be guilty of such wickedness?"

For answer Eugène could only sob and point his finger at Monsieur de Latour. The presence of Mademoiselle Cheri was peculiarly unpleasant to Monsieur de Latour at that moment. She was entirely too outspoken, and she proceeded on the spot to treat Monsieur de Latour to what ladies call giving a man a piece of their minds.

"Monsieur," she said severely, "no one can approve of your conduct in Paris. I

thought I knew the extent to which folly would lead you, but I never dreamed of anything like your preposterous behaviour during the past week. You have brought great distress upon your niece and mortification upon all your friends."

This was too much for Monsieur de Latour. It was bad enough to be hectored over by Louis, but by Séline Cheri, a soap-boiler's daughter! He struggled to his feet.

"Mademoiselle," he replied in a tone of equal severity, "I think I understand the animus from which you speak. You have perhaps observed that the Comtesse de Beauregard looks upon me with an eye of favour, and you probably disapprove of it."

"Quite so," answered Mademoiselle Cheri frankly.

"Ah! Perhaps you recall the time, mademoiselle, when I was an aspirant for your own hand."

"Yes," replied Mademoiselle Cheri, "and I will say to you, now that we are both old enough to speak frankly, that but for the obligation I felt to take care of my father in his

declining years, I might have married you, Victor de Latour. You were then a worthy and estimable citizen, a good man and an excellent soap-boiler. If you had continued as such the time might have come when both of us, remembering our early association and feeling the need of friendship and companionship in our old age, would have married; but it is impossible now."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," replied Monsieur de Latour in a rage. "The pain of my rejection is very much mitigated by the fact that I have not made you an offer."

"I know it," calmly answered Mademoiselle Cheri. "We are speaking plainly, as plain people like ourselves do speak, and your fine-gentleman airs sit ridiculously on you, Victor."

This further enraged Monsieur de Latour so much that he whirled around and plumped himself down into a chair, almost turning his back upon Mademoiselle Cheri, who remained placid though disapproving.

A long and painful silence ensued, which became so intolerable to Monsieur de Latour

that he suddenly jumped up and rushed out of the room and into the saloon. As he opened the door General Granier arose. Instead of his usual gay and cordial greeting, General Granier bowed stiffly and said:

"I am calling upon Madame de Beauregard."

Monsieur de Latour was in no state to remember the amenities of social life. He fell, rather than sank, into a chair, and stretching his legs out, ran his hands through his already rumpled hair, and then, forgetting General Granier's presence, said to himself:

"My head is very bad, and my stomach is worse, but those ballet-girls were pretty."

"You appear to plume yourself," said General Granier stiffly, "upon your performances in Paris last week. Let me tell you, my dear sir, they were not a patch upon what I used to do in the year '60."

"Oh, nonsense!" answered Monsieur de Latour. "You never had such a week in your life as I have had."

"Do you mean to impugn my word, monsieur?" asked General Granier, advancing

and putting his right hand into his trousers pocket, and at the same time lifting up his right leg, which was a habit of his.

"Come, now," said Monsieur de Latour, shying off, "I don't like you to lift that leg up that way at me. It's a gun, and I know it, and it might be loaded."

"I always keep it loaded," snapped General Granier, "and if you wish to know just how effective it is, observe that flower-pot across the room."

He whirled around on his left leg, and lifting his right one at an angle of forty-five degrees, clicked the trigger in his pocket. The next instant the flower-pot tumbled over, smashed into bits.

"There, now," cried Monsieur de Latour, edging away, "I knew you were going to do something of the kind. I think you ought to be reported to the police for carrying that thing loaded all the time, and I am not sure it is not my duty to report you."

General Granier, twirling his mustache, backed out of the door.

"Monsieur de Latour," he said, "I don't

understand at all your language to me this morning. I shall write you and ask a categorical explanation. Good morning!" And he disappeared.

Monsieur de Latour, lying back in his chair in much agitation, turned over in his mind the meaning of General Granier's remarks. But while meditating a drowsiness overcame him. He had not slept for a week, and in a few minutes his loud snores, which resembled the trumpeting of an elephant, resounded through the great room.

Monsieur de Latour slept peacefully. The morning grew to high noon, high noon to afternoon, and Monsieur de Latour had just begun to make up the arrears of sleep he had lost in Paris. He was roused by a knock at the door, and a footman entered with a note. Monsieur de Latour, more asleep than awake, drowsily opened it, but at the first word he sat bolt upright and became thoroughly alert. It was from General Granier, and ran thus:

"Monsieur Victor Louis de Latour:

"I demand an explanation of your language to me this morning, and if the explanation is not forthcoming I shall

insist upon that satisfaction which one gentleman accords another. I am, sir, etc.,

"AUGUSTE GRANIER."

"Now, what the devil does that mean?" said Monsieur de Latour, reading the note over.

"It means," cried Julie's voice from behind his shoulder, "that General Granier wants you to fight him."

Monsieur de Latour glanced up. Julie had entered noiselessly, and holding up her dainty skirts, was peering over his shoulder and reading the note in his hand.

"He will be very much disappointed, then," replied Monsieur de Latour promptly. "I haven't the slightest notion of fighting him or anybody else. I am a peaceable, law-abiding citizen, and I don't propose to shed the blood of a fellow-citizen, or let anybody shed mine, if I can help it. So I shall immediately write General Granier."

"Won't you let me write it for you?" asked Julie artlessly, apparently in entire unconsciousness of the awful consequences which the note might involve.

"No!" thundered Monsieur de Latour, "you have written enough notes for me. I shall write this myself."

Julie ran and fetched pen and ink, put them on the table, and Monsieur de Latour drew his chair up to it and attempted to write, but it was impossible. That week in Paris had upset his hand as much as it had his head and his stomach. He could not form a single letter.

"There," he cried, throwing down the pen, "you will have to write it for me, but be sure you don't make any mistakes."

"I shall take the greatest care," sweetly replied Julie.

Then she wrote, Monsieur de Latour dictating slowly:

"General Auguste Granier,

"Monsieur:

"I have received your letter, which I do not comprehend in the least; but I beg you will understand one point distinctly, and it is this—that I will not fight you, and this resolution will hold in any event. All arrangements between us must conform to that understanding. In this I am acting according to my conscience. I shall be glad to hear from you further, and meanwhile I am, etc.,

"Victor Louis de Latour."

"Now," said Monsieur de Latour to Julie, "make me a copy of that document and be very exact."

"I will," responded Julie with her usual promptness.

And with many nibblings at the end of her pen, crossings out and interlineations, she finally succeeded in producing two fair copies of the letter exactly alike.

"And now let me read it," said Monsieur de Latour.

His vision was blurred, however, and his head muddled by the events of the past week in Paris, and the letter appeared to him exactly what he desired.

"Very well," he said with an accent of relief, "you may send it off, and I am going to bed. It is three o'clock, and I don't wish to be disturbed until ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Before retiring to his room, however, Monsieur de Latour had Julie address and seal the letter to General Granier, and gave it himself to the footman. Ten minutes afterward he was snoring peacefully in his bedroom,

every shade drawn, the room as dark as night, and he, as he said, with the arrears of six sleepless nights to make up.

In another room in the chateau was poor Eugène de Contiac, but there was no sleep for him. In addition to his mental perturbation, be became violently ill, and had to pay dearly for the champagne and cigars of the week in Paris. Louis de Latour, with old Suzette to assist him, stood by and administered well-known remedies, consoling and encouraging the unfortunate Eugène. At intervals of an hour or two Madame de Beauregard would flounce in, cackling with rapture, and declare to Eugène that his physical condition showed that he had spent exactly such a week in Paris as a man should spend.

Eugène kept old Suzette trotting to Mélanie's room, to ask how the dear girl stood the recent developments in his conduct, and after every inquiry old Suzette came back with a doleful tale of Mademoiselle Mélanie weeping and wringing her hands and declaring that she and Eugène must part forever.

At this Eugène wept copiously, which very much increased his mental and physical agony. There was no sleep for him that night. He lay awake, groaning and sighing, and telling Louis, as long as he would listen, that such a week in Paris was dear at any price. Even if that price were two hundred and fifty thousand francs.

The next morning at nine o'clock Monsieur de Latour was still slumbering peacefully when a tremendous rap was heard at his door. He mumbled a sleepy "Come in," and Louis entered. Monsieur de Latour had not adopted the modern fashions in men's attire for the night, and still clung to a huge cambric nightgown and a nightcap with a tassel at the top of it. It was this figure, sitting up in bed, which greeted Louis.

"My dear Victor," said Louis sternly, "see what further trouble you have been getting yourself into! Here is a letter which I have just taken the liberty of opening and reading."

"Opening and reading my letters!" roared Monsieur de Latour.

"Certainly. After this I shall not only insist upon reading such letters of yours as come, but those that you write as well. My dear boy, you are not to be trusted—that is the state of the case."

Louis, throwing open the shutters and letting in the morning sun, handed the open letter to Monsieur de Latour to read. But again his shaking hand and uncertain vision prevented him, and Louis had to read the letter to him. It was from a representative of General Granier and read thus:

"MONSIEUR VICTOR LOUIS DE LATOUR:

"I am directed by my friend, General Granier, to inform you that he has received your letter of the twentieth of August containing your challenge; and I beg to say that I shall be glad to meet any appointment that you may make with a friend of yours to arrange the details of the meeting. Believe me, sir, with sentiments of the highest respect, Very truly yours,

"JEAN LE GALLIAN."

"But I didn't send him any challenge!" cried Monsieur de Latour. "Here is an exact copy of the note I sent General Granier."

He drew from under his pillow the fair

copy which Julie had made him and handed it to Louis, who read it aloud carefully. When he came to the part in which Monsieur de Latour had instructed Julie to write "I will not fight," that young person had fallen into her usual mistake. One word was left out, only a little word, but it was "not," and it made Monsieur de Latour say "I will fight you, and this resolution will hold in any event."

Monsieur de Latour fell back on his pillows.

"I know what she will say," he said, with the calmness of despair; "that 'it was only one word, and such a little one!' Great God!"

"There is no way out of it," said Louis meditatively, "and besides that, as a member of the house of De Latour you must live up to our traditions. You must fight."

Monsieur de Latour remained silent for a full minute.

"But I sha'n't fight!" he announced. "I have made up my mind not to, and I am not easily changed."

"But you must, my dear boy. As the head of the house I must insist that you shall do it."

"You may insist all you like, but I sha'n't."

"General Granier, as the challenged party, has the privilege of selecting weapons. I think it extremely likely that he will require that you will use a weapon fired with the leg, as he can do."

"Very well. I can fire just as well with my leg as I can with my arm, but I don't intend to fire at General Granier, nor to allow him to fire at me."

"Such language is most unbecoming the name you bear, and I wish to say that, out of regard for the honour of our family, I shall take the matter in my own hands and will act as your second and arrange the details of the meeting," replied Louis.

Monsieur de Latour turned over in bed and pulled the covers up so that only the top of his nightcap was visible.

"Will you kindly draw the shade down," he said, "and leave me in peace? If General Granier wants to fight me, he will have to

come into this bedroom, for I have no intention of leaving it."

"You do not appear to appreciate the seriousness of the situation," said Louis, "nor the point of honour involved."

"Be careful to shut the door after you," answered Monsieur de Latour, "and don't let them bother me with any breakfast. The bottom of my stomach has dropped out completely and I can't eat anything, but I should like a little cognac and water at ten o'clock."

Louis gazed at him meditatively.

"You might as well lie here and sleep," he said. "Your hand seems to be pretty shaky, anyhow. I am sorry the chances are so against you, not being able to hold a weapon steady nor to see clearly."

"That makes not the least difference," said Monsieur de Latour, drawing the covers up still higher. "I am not going to fight. Good morning."

"At least," Louis urged, "you will have to be at the place of meeting. That I shall see to myself."

"You must then provide a wheeled chair,"

said Monsieur de Latour coolly, "because you will never get me there any other way—likewise handcuffs and leg irons."

"You will be there," said Louis determinedly, pulling down the shade and closing the door after him.

Monsieur de Latour, left alone in silence and darkness, began to revolve things in his mind. He had determined upon one thing, and that was to discharge Julie. Fascinating though she was, that unfortunate peculiarity of hers of always leaving out one word—small, it is true, but vital, and always bringing about a catastrophe—made her not only useless but exceedingly dangerous.

He had not mentioned to Louis the method of preventing the affair which had promptly flashed into his mind. He would simply inform the police. And then, turning over in bed, he slumbered peacefully until about three o'clock, when he was again roused by Louis's entrance.

"It is all settled," said Louis cheerfully. "The meeting will take place to-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, in the wood that

skirts the field a mile off by the side of the old windmill. And just as I knew, General Granier has selected as weapons a gun to be fired with the foot. Of course it will be very difficult for you, but I am familiar with fire-arms, and I have rigged up a contrivance by which you can fire a gun with your foot. You might practise a little this afternoon, but my experience is that practice before a duel does no good, but simply is a tax upon the nerves. And, as a matter of fact, I must say to you, my dear Victor, that I don't think you stand the least show of hitting General Granier."

"I quite agree with you," replied Monsieur de Latour. "Nothing would surprise me more."

"And as for General Granier hitting you —well, I don't think that he means to kill you, but I fancy that he means to inflict a slight wound, perhaps leaving a mark upon your scalp or taking the tip off your ear. But one can never tell." And here Louis shook his head dolefully.

Monsieur de Latour shivered a little at

this; nevertheless he had his own reasons for retaining his composure.

"At seven o'clock," he repeated, "in the wood that skirts the field a mile off by the side of the old windmill. Well, I sha'n't be there."

"You will be there," answered Louis firmly, "if I have, as you say, to provide a rolling chair and leg irons and handcuffs; but be there you will, because you are a De Latour."

"Good afternoon," remarked Monsieur de Latour, in the same voice in which he had spoken in the morning. "Pull down the shade and shut the door after you."

Monsieur de Latour was able to eat the wing of a chicken that evening, and a little boiled rice, brought up to him at dinner-time. Before retiring for the night he had a couple of alarm clocks placed in his room, set so as to go off at five o'clock, for Monsieur de Latour had a scheme in his mind which he had worked out during those long hours between sleeping and waking that he had spent in his room.

He had inquired about Eugène de Contiac and had been told that the poor young man was in the depths of physical and mental agony, and unable to leave his bed.

Monsieur de Latour, having fixed upon his plan of procedure, thought that he would sleep soundly, but found himself mistaken.

VIII

MARS AND CUPID

NO matter how fixed one's determination may be not to fight, nor how promptly one means to inform the police, in a case like Monsieur de Latour's there are few men who can sleep upon such a matter. Monsieur de Latour was not one of them, and he lay awake and pitched and tossed until five o'clock.

For the first time a suspicion began to steal upon him that he was, perhaps, better off at Brionville, with his middle-class friends, than at the Chateau of Montplaisir, with all of the smart people he had got about him, and with a semi-royal duke among the chateau's visitors. Then came the thought of Mademoiselle Cheri, quiet, middle-aged, middle-

class, like himself, and the remembrance seemed strangely attractive. It was chased away by the vision of the Comtesse de Beauregard and her kittenish old age, of the wild set of untamed octogenarians by which she was surrounded, and the prospect of leading a life like that of the last week in Paris; and Monsieur de Latour fell into a kind of panic.

"If I do get killed by that preposterous old scapegrace with his outlandish leg," thought Monsieur de Latour, "it will be the fault of Madame de Beauregard. That woman will have been my murderess. However, another week like the last in Paris I believe would kill me just as quickly as a bullet from General Granier's leg. Nevertheless, he won't get me to stand up and be shot at—he may be sure of that."

Monsieur de Latour, having dressed himself noiselessly in the first flush of the summer morning, crept downstairs with the quietness of a burglar bent on murder and arson, and let himself out of a small side door.

He struck out at a smart gait for the town, and making straight for the police station,

entered and demanded to see the commissary. He was informed that the commissary was at home asleep, but the policeman on duty very civilly offered to do what he could for Monsieur de Latour. The policeman was a pleasant-faced fellow of about twenty-five years of age, entirely too young, so Monsieur de Latour determined, to be trusted with such a serious affair as the present. He at once plunged into the matter.

"Monsieur," he said, "I wish to have a person, probably known to you, General Granier, arrested for making threats against my life." And then he poured out his story.

But either his mind had not yet recovered from the strain of his week in Paris, or the policeman was stupid, for after Monsieur de Latour had talked straight ahead for twenty minutes, rising and gesticulating, the policeman appeared to be thoroughly confused.

"Do I understand, monsieur," the policeman asked very politely, "that you demand the arrest of General Granier without any proof of the charges you make against him? That, you must know, is quite impossible."

Monsieur de Latour sat down and mopped his forehead.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that General Granier is to be allowed to murder me in cold blood?"

"Not at all, monsieur, but I don't quite understand the state of affairs. You have sent a challenge, so you tell me, to General Granier."

"I never told you any such thing," bawled Monsieur de Latour, jumping up from his seat and walking up and down excitedly. "It is General Granier who insists upon fighting me—that is to say, murdering me in cold blood, as I told you. Now, I don't like the idea, and I don't know any other man who does, and I demand the assistance of the law."

The policeman shook his head with a puzzled air, real or affected.

"If monsieur will return at nine o'clock, the commissary will be here," he said, "and will determine what to do."

"But I am to be shot at seven!" cried Monsieur de Latour. "That nephew of

mine—my uncle, that is—" Here Monsieur de Latour struck his forehead in agony and bewilderment. "Good Heavens! what a world this is! When I call upon you to save the life of a French citizen who is to be shot at seven you tell me to wait till nine, when the commissary will come. If you were not a policeman I should call you a great fool."

"Be careful," replied the policeman angrily, "or you will find yourself under arrest, monsieur, for abusing the police."

"Will I?" shouted Monsieur de Latour joyfully. "Well, then, I wish to tell you that I think you are the worst lot of rapscallions, thieves, rogues, and liars on the face of the earth. Now, arrest me if you like."

The policeman eyed Monsieur de Latour critically.

"I think," he said, "you are a little off your head."

"Then," promptly responded Monsieur de Latour, "arrest me as a dangerous lunatic."

"I don't think you are dangerous at all,"

replied the policeman, with the most exasperating calmness.

"I am," pleaded Monsieur de Latour, going up close to the policeman. "I am exceedingly dangerous. Now, for all you know, at this meeting with General Granier I may be determined to kill him."

"What, with a rapier? You don't look to me as if you would know a rapier when you saw it."

"No, no, no! We are to fight with guns fired with our legs."

"Come, now," said the policeman soothingly, "you sit here quietly and I will telephone to the Chateau of Montplaisir, where you say you belong, and get your uncle to come and fetch you."

With that the policeman rang up the telephone.

"Don't, don't, for Heaven's sake!" cried Monsieur de Latour. "He would drag me off to the meeting-place and hold me up to be shot at."

But it was too late. The hour being early, the policeman had got the chateau immedi-

ately, and to Monsieur de Latour's horror he heard the policeman's end of the conversation, something like this:

"Yes, he's here, talks very wild, but seems to be harmless. . . . You will be here immediately? . . . Thanks, monsieur. . . . Shall I order a rolling-chair? Certainly; there is a place just across the street. . . . Keep him here if I can? . . . Oh, yes, he seems to be afraid to leave the station! . . . That is all? . . . Good morning, monsieur."

Monsieur de Latour knew well enough what all this meant. He sat down and sighed, and got up again and groaned.

"Your uncle will be here in a few minutes," said the policeman encouragingly, "and says he has telephoned for a wheeled chair to be here."

Monsieur de Latour, in a state of indescribable anguish, determined to make a last effort.

"See," he said to the policeman, "I am a most desperate character. I am the gentleman you probably read of in the newspapers last week in Paris. I am the person who took

the nineteen ballet-girls out to the races, and we drank among us one hundred and twenty-seven bottles of champagne—that is, I paid for one hundred and twenty-seven bottles—and smashed a twenty-thousand-franc automobile, and lost twelve thousand francs by betting on flies, and did a great many other things that I don't remember now. And I am determined to kill General Granier!" Here Monsieur de Latour assumed an air of fierceness entirely foreign to him, and shouted: "I intend to have General Granier's blood! Do you understand that? I mean to kill him!"

"Of course! of course!" replied the policeman soothingly. "You couldn't do better. Now, sit down quietly, and you can kill him a great deal more comfortably when your uncle comes."

"But I wish to kill him now," shouted Monsieur de Latour, thinking his ruse had succeeded. "I am to meet him at seven o'clock in the wood on the edge of the field near the old windmill."

With that Monsieur de Latour made a

feint of going out of the door, and cannoned against another policeman coming in to relieve the one at the desk. A whispered conversation took place between the two, and then Monsieur de Latour's enemy, as he had begun to regard this smart-looking young policeman, came out, and taking him by the arm, said to him:

"Now, there is a wheeled chair at the door. Suppose you get in it, and I will wheel you about the town a little."

Monsieur de Latour hesitated for a moment and then joyfully consented. General Granier could not possibly attack him under the wing of a policeman. So, linking his arm in that of the policeman, they went out of the door, where they found a wheeled chair and an attendant. The policeman whispered a few words to the attendant, who went away laughing, and then, Monsieur de Latour seating himself within the wheeled chair, the policeman, with a grin almost as big as himself, began to shove it along the street.

"I think," said Monsieur de Latour, over his shoulder, "it will be just as well for us to

take a little tour around the town until about eight o'clock. By that time General Granier and his second will be tired of waiting, and then it will be quite safe for me to go back to the Chateau of Montplaisir. You can arrange to have both of us arrested, and I should prefer, myself, to be incarcerated. It is now only half-past six o'clock, so we can take quite a pleasant jaunt. I am certainly very much obliged to you for pushing me, and hope you don't find me too heavy?"

"Not in the least," replied the policeman, to whom every proposition of Monsieur de Latour seemed agreeable.

"And whatever you do," added Monsieur de Latour impressively, "don't take me anywhere near that wood. You see, my nephew——"

"I thought you said he was your uncle?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't make any difference—he will be there, and he wants me to fight! He dragged me into this thing, and I don't want to be at that place at that hour."

They were then on the outskirts of the town, and Monsieur de Latour, who was not

very familiar with the locality, pleased himself with the notion that they were going farther and farther away from the dreaded spot near the windmill. The policeman, who was not very expert with wheeled chairs, bumped Monsieur de Latour up and down considerably, and once nearly jolted him out.

"Look here, my friend," said Monsieur de Latour, turning around and eyeing the fellow, who seemed to be enjoying the situation immensely, "I had just as soon be shot by General Granier as to be thrown out of this chair and have my neck broken."

"You see, monsieur," replied the policeman suavely, "I am not used to playing nursemaid for elderly gentlemen, but I am doing the best I can."

Presently they came to a pleasant country road which Monsieur de Latour remembered to have seen in his drives about the place, but what was his horror suddenly to find looming up before him in the vivid light of the early morning a huge windmill.

"Take me away from here!" he cried to the policeman.

But the policeman, suddenly putting on a spurt, started the chair off at a dead run, jolting Monsieur de Latour most unmercifully and making it quite impossible for him to get out. His screams to stop were unheeded, and in about five minutes' time he found himself in the appointed place in the wood just on the edge of the field. And, horror of horrors! there was General Granier, with a very fierce-looking gentleman in attendance, another gentleman with a sinister box which revealed his profession as a surgeon, and Louis de Latour. As soon as Louis caught sight of the wheeled chair, which the policeman was trundling along the road at a furious rate of speed, he rushed forward and, clasping Monsieur de Latour in his arms, cried:

"I knew, my dear nephew, you would not disgrace the name you bear, and, like a true De Latour, you would be on the spot to defend your honour."

Monsieur de Latour, panting and exhausted, was still more agitated by the thought that he had escaped a broken neck at the policeman's hands, only to become a

target for General Granier's leg. He held on firmly, however, to the sides of the chair, feeling himself safer there than standing on his feet.

"I told General Granier," continued Louis, "that I felt sure some accident had occurred which would merely delay your arrival. I went to your room before six o'clock and was puzzled by your disappearance, but soon I was called up over the telephone and discovered where you were. I thought it useless to come to the police station after you, knowing that nothing would detain you from this place at this hour."

Every man has in him some species of courage, and Monsieur de Latour had enough moral courage to own up to a lack of physical courage.

"My dear Louis," he said, recovering himself, "we may as well understand each other. I never had the slightest idea of standing up to be shot at by General Granier. If he chooses to murder an innocent man sitting here in a wheeled chair, he may do it—I am at his mercy—but as for taking part in

a duel, nothing was further from my intention, and I said so all the time!"

Louis gazed at him meditatively.

"I think the presence of this policeman has something to do with what you say," he remarked, "but I believe we can easily stop his mouth."

Louis came up to the policeman and looked meaningly into his face, at which the policeman, upon whose countenance a stupendous grin was fixed, said:

"I sha'n't make any trouble, monsieur; but I think it only fair to tell you that this is the most bloodthirsty old gentleman I ever came across in my life. He swore that he would have General Granier's blood and meant to kill him at all costs. I never saw a man in all my days so bent on murder as this one is."

"You are an infernal——"

Monsieur de Latour was going to say liar, but it suddenly occurred to him that the policeman had some justification for what he said.

"Very well," he continued, tucking his feet under him, "it makes no difference what

I said—perhaps I had a motive in it. But I don't mean to fight—I have said that from the beginning, and I am not a man to say one thing one day and another the next."

At that the fierce-looking person whom Louis addressed as Major Le Gallian, advanced and said freezingly to Louis:

"Monsieur, now that you have your principal on the ground, is it not as well to begin work?"

"No," promptly replied Monsieur de Latour. "You may not have heard what I said, so I will repeat it for your benefit. I never agreed to fight General Granier; I have no grudge against him, and if he has one against me I am willing to apologise. That is final."

Major Le Gallian stood at attention and looked at Louis, as much as to say, "The next move is yours."

General Granier, some distance off, was making mysterious gyrations, with his right leg lifted at an angle that would have destroyed the equilibrium of most men, but which he maintained with perfect ease. The sight of him at that very moment was most

terrifying to Monsieur de Latour. Louis, with an air of great perturbation, turned again to Monsieur de Latour and began to speak, but the latter, waving his hand, cut him short.

"Not a word, not a word, my dear boy—my mind is made up and has been all the time."

"Do you mean to say," asked Louis sternly, "that you do not intend to live up to the courageous traditions of the house of De Latour?"

"That is precisely what I don't mean to do," promptly answered Monsieur de Latour. "And to be perfectly frank with you, I would rather be a live soap-boiler than a dead head of the house of De Latour."

"Then I shall be obliged to disown you as my nephew."

"I wish you would. It has bothered me almost to death ever since the unlucky mistake was made by that pretty little rogue in petticoats, Julie de Brésac—that is if it was a mistake at all."

To have a principal on the ground who positively refuses to fight would be an em-

barrassing situation for most men; but Louis, with the air of a man who supposes that no one has heard what has passed, turned to Major Le Gallian.

"I think," he said, "that we may as well begin measuring off the ground."

This took them off a little distance, and if Monsieur de Latour had been experienced in such matters he would have noticed that their heads were uncommonly close together for gentlemen engaged in such grim work, and that both of them carefully avoided letting their faces be seen.

Monsieur de Latour dived down in his pockets, and, producing four twenty-franc pieces, held them up to the policeman and nodded anxiously. The policeman's grin grew broader, if possible, and he nodded back, and then, with a whirl that almost pitched Monsieur de Latour head foremost out of the wheeled chair, the policeman started him off down the road at a gait that would have put a professional sprinter to his trumps.

Both Louis de Latour and Major Le Gal-

lian were keeping their backs to their principals, so that the policeman got a good start of them before they found that the bird had flown. But General Granier had seen the whole proceeding and, shouting, "Stop him! stop him!" started off in chase. However, his right leg, which was an excellent weapon, was by no means sufficient as a motor, and very much impeded his progress. And by some strange fortuity neither Louis de Latour nor Major Le Gallian could be made to heed the general's shouts and efforts to catch the rapidly retreating wheeled chair. When at last General Granier succeeded in attracting their attention, and pointed down the road, the wheeled chair had just turned the corner of a thicket some distance off, and both Louis and Major Le Gallian, looking in an entirely opposite direction, declared they saw no sign of Monsieur de Latour, and could not imagine in what quarter he had vanished. This infuriated General Granier, who, shaking his fist in the faces of Major Le Gallian and Louis de Latour, shrieked:

"You have tricked me and played with me. Was ever a gentleman so treated before? I demand satisfaction of both of you."

Louis and Major Le Gallian were profuse in apologies, and Louis undertook to explain and apologise for Monsieur de Latour's conduct.

"You see, my dear general," he said, "after all, my nephew is but a soap-boiler, and how absurd it is to expect a soap-boiler to have a sense of *noblesse oblige*. I apologise for him, and if you insist on fighting, I will cheerfully take my nephew's place."

"I do insist on fighting," screamed General Granier, snapping his false teeth viciously.

But here Major Le Gallian interfered.

"I can't permit this," he protested. "The proceedings this morning have been so irregular that it is impossible they can be taken seriously, and they cannot be carried further."

"At all events," said Louis, with a bow to General Granier, "the gallantry shown by you, monsieur, is worthy of your name and military rank. I shall have great pleasure in

testifying to it, particularly in the presence of my nephew, whose conduct I deplore, and in that of the Comtesse de Beauregard, who, as you know, is a great admirer of spirit in a man. I am inclined to think that my nephew has lost whatever chance he had of winning Madame de Beauregard's hand."

A sudden change came over General Granier's wizened old face.

"Do you think so?" asked he, stroking his mustache.

"I certainly do," responded Louis. "And I may say to you that there are other gentlemen whom I might name that come much nearer Madame de Beauregard's ideas of a man than my nephew, worthy as he is, and admirable in his own province of soap-boiling. I hope, monsieur, that matters may be arranged so that our former pleasant relations may be resumed, and that I may have the pleasure of seeing you at the Chateau of Montplaisir, especially during Madame de Beauregard's stay there."

General Granier, smiling like a May morning, replied:

"I am perfectly willing, monsieur, to be reconciled to Monsieur de Latour, and any arrangement which Major Le Gallian makes will be agreeable to me. I need scarcely say that I am without malice in the affair."

Louis and Major Le Gallian retired a few yards off, and Louis whispered in Major Le Gallian's ear:

"We can have a great deal of amusement still out of the old gentleman, so you had better arrange to bring him up to the chateau to dinner to-night, and come yourself."

Major Le Gallian, whose countenance had been hitherto unmoved, winked and grinned in reply, and then, turning to General Granier, announced gravely that everything had been settled to his entire satisfaction, and that he had accepted an invitation for both his principal and himself to dine at the chateau that night.

Meanwhile, the doctor, sitting with his back against a tree, had fallen asleep. Major Le Gallian, going up to him, shook him vigorously and shouted in his ear:

"Get up. The whole thing has been arranged, and not a shot has been fired."

"Eh?" cried the doctor, jumping up, "so nothing happened, after all? Well, I am very much disappointed—that's all I can say—for I really hoped to have had some interesting professional experiences."

And then, taking up his gruesome-looking case, he disconsolately followed Major Le Gallian and General Granier down the road to where their carriage awaited them. The cabman, who had also fallen asleep on his box, seemed equally disappointed when he found his patrons had escaped without death or even injury.

IX

THE ROGUISH LITTLE BLIND BOY LAUGHS LAST

ABOUT a half hour later a cab and a wheeled chair both appeared before the entrance of the Chateau of Montplaisir. Louis de Latour jumped out of the cab while Monsieur de Latour scrambled out of the wheeled chair. The four gold pieces slipped into the policeman's hand increased still further his colossal grin, but it was nothing to the air of pleasure and relief which Monsieur de Latour wore. He took Louis by the arm, and the two marched into the room known as Monsieur de Latour's study.

"I have thought it all over," said Monsieur de Latour, sitting down in a chair and putting his hands on his knees, "and I know what to do."

"What do you mean?" asked Louis.

"Why, the whole business, marrying and the rest of it. I am not going to marry Madame de Beauregard. That woman is too much for me."

"So everybody knows," remarked Louis.

"In fact, I would rather stand up and be shot at by General Granier's leg than marry Madame de Beauregard, with the life she would lead me. And as for a pretty young girl like Julie, that unfortunate peculiarity she has of always leaving out one word in everything she writes and getting one word twisted in everything she tells is very annoying. So I have abandoned all idea of marrying her. Perhaps she might take you."

Louis assumed a reflective air.

"I think," he said, "I could break her of that unfortunate habit, as you call it, which she has," and at the same moment he took a dainty note out of his pocket.

It was in Julie's expansive handwriting, but there was not a single word left out, and it was expressed with the utmost clearness and precision.

"I shall venture to read it to you," said Louis. "I don't think that Mademoiselle de Brésac will be offended with me." And he read:

"I have just had your note. Nothing would induce me to marry any one except you. If my aunt and Monsieur de Latour will not give their consent, then we can wait; but I am always, until I die, your own

"JULIE DE C. DE BRÉSAC."

Monsieur de Latour listened attentively.

"Now, if she had been as clear and businesslike as that in what she wrote for me, I would have been perfectly satisfied."

"Possibly she did not understand so well what you wished her to say."

"She seems to understand well enough what she wishes to say herself in this case. Well, now, I shall tell you my plan. I shall marry Mademoiselle Cheri."

"Provided she will have you."

"Oh, I think she will!"

"And also provided that I consent. Remember, my dear fellow, that I am your uncle."

"The devil you are!"

"Recollect, if you please, the legal rights of adoption."

Monsieur de Latour jumped up, and taking an angry turn or two about the room, sat down again.

"Very well," he said, "if you refuse your consent to my marrying Mademoiselle Cheri, I can very easily refuse my consent to your marrying Julie."

"Monsieur Bertoux tells me that it is a complicated question," responded Louis, "but nevertheless our marriage could scarcely be prevented. However I, as your uncle, could very easily prevent your marrying Mademoiselle Cheri."

This infuriated Monsieur de Latour, who, shaking his fist in Louis's face, bawled:

"I'd like to see you try, and I have a great mind to elope to America with Mademoiselle Cheri this very day!"

Louis whistled softly, by way of showing his contempt for this proposition. Then Monsieur de Latour, relapsing into a gloomy silence, sat huddled up in his chair for some minutes. Presently he growled:

"If I give my consent to your marriage with Julie, I presume you would consent, confound you! to my marriage with Mademoiselle Cheri?"

"Certainly I would," cried Louis, "but I should still exercise a fatherly care over you, and see that two giddy young things like you and Mademoiselle Cheri did not commit any indiscretions—like your duel of this morning, for example."

"Into which you dragged me against my will," replied Monsieur de Latour. "I outwitted all of you. It cost me eighty francs, but it was the best investment I ever made. It saved my life from that bloodthirsty old general."

"I shall, of course," continued Louis loftily, "keep an eye upon you, regulate your expenditures, and require you to report to me at least once a week till I see how you are behaving yourself. This will be my duty as your uncle."

Monsieur de Latour ground his teeth with rage. Then, after another pause. he said:

"I believe that whole scheme was arranged between you and Julie."

A smile flickered in Louis's eyes, but he made no reply to this. At last Monsieur de Latour cried:

"Confound both of you! But I will give you the three hundred thousand francs to let me off from that agreement."

"No, my dear Victor," answered Louis, shaking his head, "agreeable as it would be to me to have that three hundred thousand francs, I can't make a relationship so delicate and tender as ours a matter of barter and sale."

"You mean the power of thwarting and opposing me?" cried Monsieur de Latour very excitedly. "Well, I will give you four hundred thousand francs to let me off."

"No, I cannot, after having just acquired you as a nephew, part with you so easily."

"So cheaply, you mean. I will give you five hundred thousand francs."

"You affront me."

"Five hundred and fifty thousand."

"You insult me."

"Six hundred thousand."

"Be silent. I can stand no more."

"You mean you won't let me off at any price?"

"I must consult Julie first."

"This is enough to put a man in a madhouse—that I am to be discussed by two such flibbertigibbets. Of course it's nothing but a scheme to get money out of me, but six hundred thousand francs is all I mean to pay for my liberty."

Just then the door burst open, and in pranced Madame de Beauregard. It was still very early in the morning, and Madame de Beauregard had not made her midday toilet. She wore a peignoir, and the deficiencies of her hair-dressing were concealed by a shawl wrapped around her head. She had slippers on her little feet, but Monsieur de Latour suspected that she had omitted to put on her stockings.

Monsieur de Latour, not feeling equal to encountering Madame de Beauregard just at that moment, retired hastily into his bedroom adjoining. But Madame de Beauregard,

who was no respecter of persons, followed him in and almost collared him as he retreated toward the fireplace.

"So," she cried, "you call yourself a man of spirit, and you are put into a wheeled chair to be carried to the field of honour, and then you pay a policeman eighty francs to trundle you away. And I believe you actually got it into your ridiculous old head that I would marry you. Not for worlds!"

Here Louis, seeing a chance to put in a word for General Granier, said:

"But, madame, General Granier was present and acted with the utmost gallantry. I have never seen such a fire-eater. He not only frightened my nephew, but he frightened me."

"Did he really?" asked Madame de Beauregard, whirling around.

"And his leg was as steady as a rock, though he had been up three nights running, playing cards and drinking champagne until breakfast-time."

"Was he really? Well, I declare, if he were fifty years younger I'd marry him."

"He's coming to dinner to-night," put in Louis insinuatingly. "My own belief, madame, is that you would have difficulty in finding any man fifty years younger than General Granier with the life and spirit that he has in him."

"At all events," said Madame de Beauregard, addressing Monsieur de Latour, who, chased almost into the fireplace, was about taking refuge in a wardrobe, "I shouldn't think of marrying an old sheep like you, my dear man. You had much better marry the soap-boiler's daughter, Mademoiselle Cheri, and the couple of you will be about as tame as a pair of barnyard fowls."

Monsieur de Latour, stung by the contempt expressed in Madame de Beauregard's tone, plucked up his courage.

"It is my wish to marry Mademoiselle Cheri, if she will have me, madame," he said, "and as for leading the life of barnyard fowls—well, it agrees with my constitution better than the life that you, madame, will probably lead with General Granier. And

now, madame, if you will kindly leave me, I wish to arrange my toilet."

"Don't mind me," said the old lady nonchalantly, seating herself on the bed.

Monsieur de Latour, meaning to frighten her, peeled off his coat. Madame de Beauregard, without flinching, spread her petticoats around her, and began to sing a song which ended in a refrain of "Tra la la something or other." Monsieur de Latour then removed his waistcoat, but Madame de Beauregard stood, or rather sat, her ground undauntedly.

"Will you force me, madame, to appear *sans culottes*?" asked Monsieur de Latour in desperation.

"Just as you please, my dear man. I don't mind a little thing like that."

Monsieur de Latour, finding himself defeated, resumed his waistcoat and coat, and offering his arm to Madame de Beauregard, the old lady skipped off with him. Monsieur de Latour escorted her out to the terrace. There sat Mademoiselle Cheri, Mélanie and Eugène de Contiac. Madame de Beaure-

gard's sketchy toilet gave a slight shock to all of them, but the old lady herself remarked casually:

"I know I haven't got half enough clothes on, but you needn't look at me, and you can't see without looking, that much is certain."

Eugène de Contiac had in his hands a book of sermons. He made not the least attempt to conceal this when Madame de Beauregard appeared, but kept it openly and shamelessly in view.

"So you are at it again!" shrieked Madame de Beauregard. "That's the way it has been ever since that idiotic Bertoux paid the two hundred and fifty thousand francs to your credit in bank. He says I told him to do it, and perhaps I did, as I really thought you had mended your ways by that trip to Paris."

"My dear aunt," quietly replied Eugène, "Mélanie has forgiven me that trip to Paris, and I have promised her never to go upon a like expedition. I was perfectly safe in doing this, as another such week would be

my death. And as you have kindly made me independent, Mélanie has agreed to marry me, provided Monsieur de Latour gives his consent."

Monsieur de Latour assumed a very stern and forbidding air, and then said:

"I must consider it."

Then Mademoiselle Cheri, rising and going to him with the familiarity of an old friend, said:

"Come now, Victor, you don't mean that you will really interfere with the happiness of these two young people?"

Monsieur de Latour, seeing his chance, remarked significantly:

"Shall we discuss it a little, then?" And the two walked off toward the orangery.

Once under its green shade, Monsieur de Latour, with the air and manner of a man of twenty-five making love to a girl of eighteen, said sentimentally:

"I will give my consent upon one condition, and it is that you, Séline, forgive all my follies and faithlessness, and marry me. I am done with great people. I have nearly

"'I will give my consent upon one condition.'"

been killed by two of them—that dreadful old lady over yonder and General Granier. I am a changed man. Instead of being the head of the house of De Latour, I should like to return to Brionville and boil soap the rest of my life. And if you, Séline, will go with me, I will promise you to lead a quiet, respectable and, I hope, respected life the rest of my days."

Mademoiselle Séline looked at him and her kind eyes grew kinder.

"If that be true, Victor," she answered sweetly after a moment, "then we may indeed spend the rest of our lives together. As long as you aspired to rank and fashion, and courted the society of people above you, who simply amused themselves at your expense, I could not think of marrying you. But now that you have become the Victor de Latour of twenty years ago, well then——"

Mademoiselle Cheri, with a smile, gave her hand, still plump and pretty, to Monsieur de Latour, who raised it to his lips.

"And now," she continued, "you will not

stand between Mélanie and her happiness, for I know that those two are sincerely attached to each other."

To this Monsieur de Latour, like a true lover, replied: "Your will, Séline, shall be my law."

Monsieur de Latour and Mademoiselle Cheri, their countenances beaming, returned to the group, which had been increased by the appearance of Louis and Julie, who had come from Heaven knows where. As soon as the group caught sight of Monsieur de Latour and Mademoiselle Cheri all knew that something had happened—that something which makes or mars a lifetime. In this case it was evident that Monsieur de Latour's happiness was made forever. His countenance shone like the harvest moon, he stepped high, as one in whose veins joy is pulsating, and he radiated satisfaction. Mademoiselle Cheri was smiling and composed, and her gentle face expressed a tranquil happiness.

"My friends," said Monsieur de Latour, still holding Mademoiselle Cheri's plump hand as they drew near, "felicitate me, I beg

of you. Mademoiselle Cheri has promised to forgive me and to marry me."

At this Mélanie kissed them both joyfully, and Louis, with a paternal air, said:

"My dear nephew, I assure you there is no one I would more gladly welcome as my niece than Mademoiselle Cheri, and I may say that Mademoiselle de Brésac, who will certainly be your future aunt, feels as I do."

"Indeed I do!" cried Julie, laying her hand upon Monsieur de Latour's arm. "And I rejoice in the thought of becoming aunt to you and dear Mademoiselle Cheri——"

"What did you say?" asked Monsieur de Latour incredulously.

"As your prospective aunt, dear Victor," Julie reiterated, with the calmest air in the world. "Of course, if I marry Louis, I shall be your aunt."

"Come," said Monsieur de Latour, a little upset by the turn of the conversation, "let us stop all this nonsense. I haven't the slightest objection to your marrying Louis. I like the scamp, in spite of the annoyance that he has caused me, and I believe him to be an excel-

lent fellow, but I can't be made further ridiculous by this uncle and nephew business. There has been quite enough of it, and I desire you to stop it. So I propose that to-day we shall straighten out the relationship and correct the mistake that you made, and I will hand over the three hundred thousand francs with which I agreed to endow Louis. It is worth that much to get rid of his patronising airs and infernal meddling."

At this Monsieur de Latour found himself struggling in Louis's embrace and almost felt his ribs cracking, while Julie nearly strangled him with kisses. Madame de Beauregard's clear old voice cut the morning air as she proclaimed:

"Good Heavens! all the world seems to be getting married. I shall ring up General Granier over the telephone and tell him that I mean to marry him just as soon as I have time to attend to anything. Let me see—automobiling this morning, casino in the afternoon, dinner in the evening; automobiling to-morrow morning, casino in the afternoon, ball in the evening—well, I shall arrange to

get married as soon as possible; but one leads such a gay life in Dinard that it's very hard to find time to do anything, even to get married."

To judge, however, from the radiance of happiness which played upon every face assembled upon the terrace of the Chateau of Montplaisir that sunny August morning, it was plain that each of them, except Madame de Beauregard, would easily and quickly find time for the perfect union of hearts and souls and minds which awaited in marriage each pair of lovers.

(1)

The Reckoning.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

The author's intention is to treat, in a series of four or five romances, that part of the war for independence which particularly affected the great landed families of northern New York, the Johnsons, represented by Sir William, Sir John, Guy Johnson, and Colonel Claus; the notorious Butlers, father and son, the Schuylers, Van Rensselaers, and others.

The first romance of the series, Cardigan, was followed by the second, The Maid-at-Arms. The third, in order, is not completed. The fourth is the present volume.

As Cardigan pretended to portray life on the baronial estate of Sir William Johnson, the first uneasiness concerning the coming trouble, the first discordant note struck in the harmonious councils of the Long House, so, in The Maid-at-Arms, which followed in order, the author attempted to paint a patroon family disturbed by the approaching rumble of battle. That romance dealt with the first serious split in the Iroquois Confederacy; it showed the Long House shattered though not fallen; the demoralization and final flight of the great landed families who remained loyal to the British Crown; and it struck the key-note to the future attitude of the Iroquois toward the patriots of the frontier—revenge for their losses at the battle of Oriskany—and ended with the march of the militia and continental troops on Saratoga.

The third romance, as yet incomplete and unpublished, deals with the war-path and those who followed it led by the landed gentry of Tryon County; and ends with the first solid blow delivered at the Long House, and the terrible punishment of the Great Confederacy.

The present romance, the fourth in chronological order, picks up the thread at that point.

The author is not conscious of having taken any liberties with history in preparing a framework of facts for a mantle of romance.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

NEW YORK, *May 26, 1904.*

IOLE

Colored inlay on the cover, decorative borders, head-pieces, thumb-nail sketches, and tail-pieces. Frontispiece and three full-page illustrations. 12mo. Ornamental Cloth, $1.25.

Does anybody remember the opera of The Inca, and that heart-breaking episode where the Court Undertaker, in a morbid desire to increase his professional skill, deliberately accomplishes the destruction of his middle-aged relatives in order to inter them for the sake of practice?

If I recollect, his dismal confession runs something like this:

"It was in bleak November
When I slew them, I remember,
As I caught them unawares
Drinking tea in rocking-chairs."

And so he talked them to death, the subject being "What Really Is Art?" Afterward he was sorry—

"The squeak of a door,
The creak of a floor,
My horrors and fears enhance;
And I wake with a scream
As I hear in my dream
The shrieks of my maiden aunts!"

Now it is a very dreadful thing to suggest that those highly respectable pseudo-spinsters, the Sister Arts, supposedly cozily immune in their polygamous chastity (for every suitor for favor is popularly expected to be wedded to his particular art)—I repeat, it is very dreadful to suggest that these impeccable old ladies are in danger of being talked to death.

But the talkers are talking and Art Nouveau rockers are rocking, and the trousers of the prophet are patched with stained glass, and it is a day of dinkiness and of thumbs.

Let us find comfort in the ancient proverb: "Art talked to death shall rise again." Let us also recollect that "Dinky is as dinky does;" that "All is not Shaw that Bernards;" that "Better Yeates than Clever;" that words are so inexpensive that there is no moral crime in robbing Henry to pay James.

Firmly believing all this, abjuring all atom-pickers, slab furniture, and woodchuck literature—save only the immortal verse:

"And there the wooden-chuck doth tread;
While from the oak trees' tops
The red, red squirrel on the head
The frequent acorn drops."

Abjuring, as I say, dinkiness in all its forms, we may still hope that those cleanly and respectable spinsters, the Sister Arts, will continue throughout the ages, rocking and drinking tea unterrified by the million-tongued clamor in the back yard and below stairs, where thumb and forefinger continue the question demanded by intellectual exhaustion:

"L'arr! Kesker say l'arr?"

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